

Schools in Action



CASE STUDY: Woodroffe School Lyme Regis

The Woodroffe School in Lyme Regis has an extraordinary physical site of about 30 acres, located on a hillside overlooking the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Jurassic Coast. The school is transforming their outdoor areas into a series of beautiful botanical garden areas with trees, shrubs, an orchard, ponds, a dry gravel garden, vegetable beds, and more, which will boost biodiversity, student wellbeing, and learning opportunities.

“ This is a long-term project to enhance various parts of the school, improving the planting, putting in trees and shrubs, insect-friendly plants and generally making this a space which will be better for education, for the environment, better for biodiversity, well-being and physical health for all. Spending time outdoors has an incredible impact on our students’ wellbeing. The Botanical Garden will be a calming, restorative space where pupils can reflect, connect with nature, and feel a sense of pride in their school environment. It will become a living classroom that supports mindfulness, resilience, and joy in learning. ”

- Assistant Head Teacher - Inclusion



The Top Garden at Woodroffe - to be re-designed as a permaculture garden with pond.

The project aims to create a school campus with a series of areas of intensive planting to create year round colour, interest through shape and size, and plant diversity which would then be linked through 'green corridors' where possible. Planting will be designed with minimal maintenance in mind so as to be sustainable long term without significant additional expenditure or labour requirements.

“ We have a wonderful Parents, Teachers & Friends Association (PTFA) team and we thought we could raise money to enhance the grounds and involve as many of the community as possible. It’s turned into a lovely collaborative project. The other thing is, everybody is busy of course, including the teachers. So, when people from outside offer their time to support the school, that’s such a huge help. Students can learn about wildlife and gardening in their own grounds, rather than the school having to find resources to transport them to other places. ”

- Sam Knights



An existing pond in use for the Forest School at Woodroffe.

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The school is much loved and very much part of the community. The PTFA wants people to see and share what they are doing in the grounds and plan to open it to the public for at least one weekend day annually, where pupils can take members of the public around the grounds and talk about what they are doing.

This will be a long-term project with future generations in mind as there is so much that could be done but it all requires time, energy and funds. The grounds also importantly include many areas where nature is left to its own devices and not tidied up. Whilst the areas where children play and sit are mown and strimmed, other areas are not and can grow wild with bramble, nettles and a wide variety of what some might regard as weeds but which are of course part of a natural landscape. and unmown grass to encourage wildflowers. The playing fields are surrounded by woodland, which is already a haven for wildlife. But there is also a specific strategic vision for each of the areas of focus. One area which has already been planted up is an internal courtyard where children play and sit during breaks. Insect-friendly plants have



Daffodils planted in November showing their first blooms in spring 2026.

been put in, hydrangeas (donated by Abbotsbury Sub-tropical Gardens), and raspberries, and a sensory herb garden with lemon verbena, rosemary, mint and thyme.

Last autumn, the team planted over 1,200 bulbs around the grounds (daffodils, tulips, crocuses, fritillaries) a number of which emerged with great colour this spring. The orchard has just been planted with apples, pears, plums, greengages, a quince and a mulberry, and a number of native tree whips have also gone in including hawthorn, rowan, holly, and Amelanchier. The initial phases of the project have been funded by a variety of sources including grants from the East Devon Landscape Fund, the Dorset Community Tree Fund, Let's Go Zero/OVO Foundation, as well as in kind donations and support from Lyme Regis Town Council, Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens, Tilbury Douglas, Turn Lyme Green, Little Green Change, Anna Wardrop Garden Design and private donations.



The Courtyard garden before its replanting with pollinator plants, hydrangeas, herbs, and fruit bushes.



Clare Matheson of Little Green Change helping to plant the bulbs donated by her organisation.

“ You can see we’ve got loads of different birds here already and this will improve the habitat for them. This bank is obviously very steep and children don’t play here. It’s only mown twice a year so it’s great actually, as a haven for wildlife. It is an obvious place to create a little orchard. We’ve already planted fruit trees like apples, pears, plums, quince, green gauge and some crab apple. ”

- Sam Knights about the orchard area.

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There is also a planned dry gravel garden area with some stone sculptures created by a previous generation of pupils. This has been inspired and developed with the assistance of Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens which has a newly planted similar type of garden. The PTFA are working with Abbotsbury on a plan to transform this relatively stark area into a garden whose colour and shape will contrast with the white stone of the sculptures and showcase plants that survive under drought conditions.

The school's idea for the orchard is not simply an esthetic one. They recognise it is time consuming managing an orchard but want this to be a school community project with many future possibilities including Apple Days, and juice-making. They acknowledge that the new fruit trees will need a lot of watering during their first years and will always need some pruning, but they believe there is an opportunity for this to involve the students directly in fruit tree management and produce.

“ Maybe it will be a while before we get a really good harvest, but in the future, we can think about running events like apple days, which would be so lovely. In our parent community we have cider makers, apple juice makers, people rooted in the land and harvesting. It can absolutely be a community thing. ”
- Sam Knights

The garden is hugely important to the young people who come here to learn.



The new herb garden with rosemary, sage, thyme, mint and more.

“ They can pick blackberries, sit on the grassy banks and chat over lunch. We thought we might put in some covered seating benches, little shelters, so that they can have their lunch outside in all weather and sit and chat. I think a lot of children just absorb the gardens internally, of course, They might not talk about them expressly, but being within them, they will respond to their beauty and notice wild and natural things and thrive! ” - Sam Knights



Volunteers planting up the bus bay area over the Easter holidays.

After a brief interlude, the school garden club has sprung back into life and has got involved directly in some of the planting for the project. A local NGO Little Green Change has helped the school with funding to plant more insect pollinator plants, and bulbs as well as coming to help do the planting with children. The garden presents huge opportunities for curriculum work too, such as biological recording, transects, horticulture and orchard cultivation. The school is very supportive of the PTFA's ideas for the garden and for it to be a tool for the curriculum.

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“ There is a genuine desire to allow this to be integrated in a meaningful way. The head gardener of Abbotsbury Gardens is coming in with his team to run a propagation workshop for our biology students. It’s so nice to have experts coming in to the school to work alongside our teachers and perhaps it could also lead to students going to Abbotsbury for work placements. ”

- Sam Knights



Thrilled Woodroffe pupils receiving their Wildlife-friendly Space Award

The School and the whole PTFA committee have supported the project from the outset. The PTFA have sought to raise awareness in the community about the project through a series of public events including a 'Great Green Pub Quiz' which was sold out, an event at the Marine Theatre in Lyme Regis with Chelsea Flower Show Gold-Winner Hugo Bugg (also an alum of the Woodroffe School) and other things. The PTFA do so much for the school, but they are always looking for more help, and of course funding is very much needed.

“ Our world has changed. Lots and lots of families have got every parent and carer working which makes volunteering difficult. But one of the things we hope with this project is that it will attract people love being outdoors and want to get involved in gardening and wildlife. ” - Sam Knights

To find out more, please visit: woodroffeschool.org/botanical-garden-project

To donate to the project, please visit: justgiving.com/campaign/woodroffebotanical



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