Whitton Community Primary, Ipswich

Joining a learning community
When discussing what more could be done within the Healthy Schools framework, someone asked “Why don’t we get one of the allotments?” and, one year on, teaching assistant Pat Prior, together with Lesley Backhouse and other colleagues, has made that idea a reality.

As holders of plot 37 the children have joined the community of local allotment holders, and are becoming knowledgeable and skilled gardeners taking advice and guidance from the other people working alongside them. Denis Stockdale, secretary of the association, has been particularly helpful. He came into school to talk about the project and amazed the children with the amount of growth vegetables can make in one season from tiny seeds.

Working with what’s there
Fortunately the plot had been well looked after, and the children were able to learn how to care for currant and gooseberry bushes, raspberries and asparagus. The children raised money by selling redcurrants to the staff and sent it to the hospice which had looked after the previous plot holder until his death.

Many hands make light work of weeding
Weeds go to make new soil on the compost heap
All round learning
Growing vegetables offers hundreds of opportunities for learning within the curriculum, and the brisk 10 minute walk to reach the allotments also contributes to the children’s physical well being. On the walk, the children excitedly discuss what jobs they are going to do when they get there - whose turn it will be to hoe; whose turn to water and so on. The work started with the year 5 class, who are now year 6. They then worked along side the special class of year 3-4-5 until a few months ago leading up to S.A.T.s. Pat and Lesley have now started an after school allotment club to allow more children to get involved.

Teachers get to grips with all the possibilities on a PD day
Sharing the work and the fun with parents
Pat and her husband do a certain amount of routine work on the plot out of school time so that the children are not limited to weeding. They are now involving parents and family too – once they have been trained in the difference between weeds and young vegetable plants!

Making a fine seed bed - like a true professional

Sharing expert knowledge

Immaculate rows of healthy vegetables
Team work in setting out and planting

Two weeks later the beans are up!

A scarecrow made from a wooden spoon

Caring for the growing crops

Picking the blackcurrants
How does our neighbour look after his plants?

In conversation the children said:

- After all the hard work you can actually eat things
- You learn how to do it when you start a garden of your own
- We got to pull up weeds and plant things
- I’ve planted onions, strawberries and tomatoes at home too. If it weren’t for the allotment I wouldn’t have known how to do it.
- You get to talk to more people – the allotment holders next door to ours have given us strawberries and told us about safe ways to keep birds off the fruit
- You get to do digging and use real tools not just little children’s tools
- When you clear away the weeds round the rhubarb you can see that the plants grow better
- It’s nice when you grow stuff and other people like the stuff you grow
- When you go on a school trip you get given one little job to do but at the allotment you can choose.
- You get to pick the fruit and get the hang of it – like how to avoid the gooseberry prickles
- Planting is better than playing games
- I thought the rhubarb crumble wouldn’t taste nice but it was fantastic!

Denis and Pat