

Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

Stebon Primary school received a Tower Habitats biodiversity grant for £2000 from the Tower Hill Trust in 2017. We used it in two areas of the school grounds.



The allotment area before and after: January 2018 (left) and June 2019



The woodland area before and after: January 2018 (left) and June 2019

The Allotment

The Allotment was a mad patch where a shed had once lived. The children used it to make mud pies, but it offered very little to nature.

Over the course of a year we transformed it into an allotment type space.

Initially the premises team had to ready the ground by remove large stones and removing wooden pillars that were cemented to the ground.



Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

The main part of the project started with “Muck in Monday”. Each year group had a time slot where they came to the space and dug into the ground to make it ready for planting. The weather was not on our side but we all got stuck in.



Once the ground was ready (and slightly drier) we arranged the planters. There are six – one for each year group. Each one links to the curriculum in a different way, also offering a different purpose.



We ordered in high quality topsoil and manure and the children filled up the planters with different mixtures of the 2, depending what was going into the planter.



We had a free delivery of woodchip to scatter around the planters. This stopped the area being a mud patch, it started to feel like a more purposeful space from this point forward.

The rest of the week was dedicated to planting.

Stebon School grow-as-you-learn



The Year 1 planter is a sensory garden and has rosemary and thyme. This links to the children's learning about naming common plants as well as using the sense of smell and touch.



The Year 2 planter is a flower garden. This is seasonal. It has had daffodils and tulips in and is currently growing some sunflowers. This links to knowing what different plants need to survive as well as learning around improving the local area. (Making it visually more attractive)



The Year 3 planter grows raspberries and strawberries. This links to learning about the purpose of different plants and knowing the functions of different plant parts. The children have to harvest the fruit when it is ready.

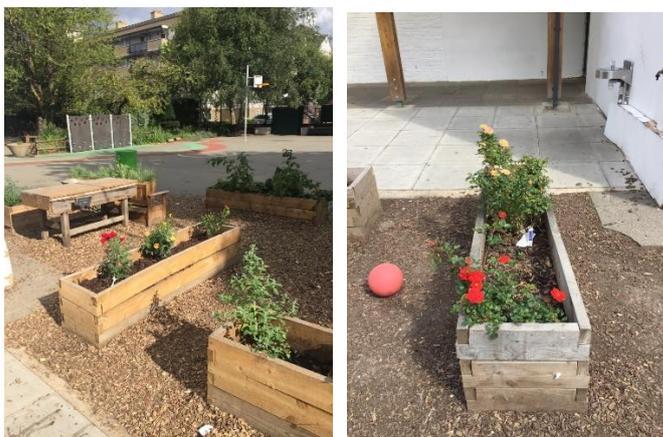
Stebon School grow-as-you-learn



The Year 4 planter is a lavender garden. In art they make lavender bags, and successfully harvested last year's lavender to do this. This planter attracts a lot of bees and butterflies. The children are becoming more confident around such creatures as a result of the garden and not only has it created beautiful planter for a range of insects it has taught the children the importance of giving these creatures space and to not be afraid of them as they are doing important jobs.



The Year 5 planter is another changing one as this is the vegetable patch. The planter has had cabbage, courgette and lettuce amongst other things. The lettuce and cabbage have then been harvested to feed the guinea pigs! This garden links to learning around being Eco Warriors and creating a more sustainable local environment. This garden also allows for interesting conversations around creatures such as slugs and snails!



The Year 6 planter is the "Remember Me" garden. Here each class picks a plant to add at the end of their year to leave as their legacy. Last year the children picked roses. These have flowered again this year and, like the lavender, are attracting some wildlife.

Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

The garden is now well established and looks like it has been at Stebon for years.

This part of the project started in February 2018 and was largely completed in July 2018.

It has already undergone some changes this academic year as the new cohorts each took over their year group planter and took ownership over what they are growing and how to maintain their plants.

Our job now is to make sure it continues to be maintained and to make sure in September each year group becomes responsible for their new planter. Through the course of a child's time at Stebon they will have a wide experience of caring for a huge range of plants and will develop a good understanding for the creatures (good and bad) that are attracted to the different plants.

The Woodland Area

The project around this area was more complicated.

Stebon had an area called the Peace Garden, which had a pond in it, some raised planters (which we had attempted to put some love into, but hadn't fully succeeded) an AstroTurf hill, all under the shade of several large trees. We were not making the most out of the area and it was blocked off for large areas at a time because it was open water it needed an adult present at all times and in wet weather the hill became quite slippery. The pond would fill up with plastic toys and rubbish stopping it from attracting any wildlife. We were very limited by what we could grow in these planters, and the allotment area meant we no longer needed them in this space.



The initial plan was to re-establish the pond area, to make it safe at all times, but accessible for science learning around pond life.



Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

We built a fence around the pond, with a gate that would open so the children could stand at the pond side with an adult. It wasn't quite what I had planned, as the gate was too small and was meant to be a whole length of the pond. We removed one of the raised planters to do this which started to open up the space.

Our Science and Garden Clubs then spent some time trying to clear the leaves and plastic toys from the pond.

We put some plants in the pond in an attempt to begin to oxygenate the water. (The problem here was the plant kept being removed during the clean-up process!)

We had a pond expert have a look, after much discussion it was decided that the most sensible idea was to remove the pond. The reasons for this were:

- it was under shade and we were losing the battle with the leaves
- the shade restricted the plants we could use
- the pond was a large plastic tub with no access for animals to get in or out easily
- to create a pond for the purpose we were after we needed to start from scratch and the budget we had did not allow for this
- the space around the edge of the pond was very restrictive, with a small concrete drop on one of the edges

We made the decision to re-think the project.

At the same time, we were establishing Forest School, but with no space for the weekly sessions. After much discussion we designed a space, where the Peace Garden had been.

We paid contractors to remove the pond and the remaining planters and to flatten out the ground as much as possible.



Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

Over the next few weeks, Science Club and Year 1 Forest School groups pulled up the weed blanket from the ground, re arranged rocks, moved around earth, layered top soil and prepared the space.



Our premises team cleaned the stone statue, making the space more appealing and Science Club then planted a range of plants. There are some creepers in the background which long term will cover the fence.

To support the plants to settle the garden area is currently marked off, but as the plants get bigger the wooden border will be removed and the children will have access to all areas of the space.



“mud tree faces”

Currently the space is being used by all children at play and lunch time. Forest School takes place every Friday and the space is used to complete many outdoor activities, including creating bird feeders and making mud pies.

We have spent all of the money from our budget, but not finished installing everything.

We have bought ladybird houses, bat boxes and a bird box with a camera.

Stebon School grow-as-you-learn

We would also like to add in more plants. The playground has very little natural ground or bushes for the children to run through, over time the hope is this woodland area will become somewhere very natural feeling where they can explore nature.

We still have Astro Turf hill, but we are in talks to change it, potentially knocking the top off and turning it into a growing space.

Officially this part of the project was completed in March 2019, but it is still ongoing and will continue to develop.

Catrin Szewczyk, Science Co-ordinator, Stebon Primary School, July 2019