



Clavering Primary School: Valuing Wild Places

Clavering Primary School is located in the north-east town of Hartlepool. The school's headteacher, Miss Helen O'Brien, is proud that Clavering pupils of all ages, particularly those who work towards their John Muir Award, show a genuine connection to and enthusiasm for nature, wild places and conservation.

The John Muir Award was first introduced to the school in September 2011 in order to promote educational, social and personal development through enjoying wild places local to the school and further afield. The school has enjoyed much success with the Award: in the first two years, over fifty pupils plus a Higher Level Teaching Assistant achieved their Discovery Award and Mr Neil C. McAvoy, the deputy headteacher, achieved the Conserver Award.



"As a school, we are passionately committed to educating the 'whole child'. The John Muir Award is used as a vehicle for the children to explore their values and spirituality whilst encouraging them to connect, enjoy and care for wild places." Mr McAvoy

Using the Four Challenges to experience wild places

The John Muir Award has been used as a framework to bring together visits to contrasting wild places and provide opportunities to take part in a range of activities outdoors. As part of the Award the school encourages all pupils to participate in a residential trip to the North York Moors, and this year every year 6 pupil was able to attend; the Pupil Premium grant was used to support eligible students.

Pupils travelled to Carlton Outdoor Adventure Centre for an action-packed week exploring the North York Moors. Here, they battled with the weather to take part in forest adventures, canoeing, mining, gorge walking, rock climbing, weaselling and night walks; a highlight being the completion of the 'Paddlepower: Entry Level Award' which saw the group paddle from Ruswarp to Whitby against the tides.

To contrast with this, the pupils supported a local community action project at Newton Hazard Plantation in Wynyard Woodland Park close to the school. Here, they learnt about how to maintain and conserve the woodland; helping to clear ditches, pick litter, build bird shelters, weave natural fences, trim back overgrown rhododendron bushes, and evaluate the impact that they, and other visitors, have on the environment.

"Spending time in wild places is important because it helps you to learn about nature and appreciate all it has to offer, whilst realising the importance of taking responsibility for the environment." Kaitlyn

Each year, the pupils host an award ceremony to celebrate their achievements which is attended by large numbers of parents, carers, other family members, governors, staff members and the local press. The event is used as an opportunity to share the impact participating in the Award has on the children.

"It is remarkable how much my child has gained from participating in the John Muir Award – both in terms of building her self-esteem and self-confidence and also in her engagement with the great outdoors." Parent of an Award Participant

Key outcomes for pupils and the school

The school dedicates time for pupils to reflect and share what they are learning by being out in wild places; why they feel it is important to spend time in them; and spiritually how they feel when in a wild place. Feedback from them demonstrates the value of working towards the John Muir Award; it provides pupils with a new and special experience in which they develop a real sense of adventure and enjoyment of the outdoors and a greater responsibility for the natural environment.



"I feel adventurous because there is a new area to be explored. I feel we are lucky to have the chance to visit so many beautiful places." Thomas

"Spending time in wild places is important in order to appreciate our natural surroundings; and to learn to live without devices and electricity that we take for granted." Liam

"Spiritually, I feel peaceful in wild places, making me feel calm due to being in such a tranquil environment. I now have a new respect for nature." Tariq

Helen O'Brien sees the programme as being an important part of the children's final year in the school. The activities run as part of the John Muir Award support the development of teamwork and other personal and social skills, helping to prepare them for secondary school, and this is recognised by students, staff and parents alike.

"Participation in the John Muir Award has engaged the pupils in ways impossible to achieve if you spend the entire year sat behind a desk. The way that Mr McAvoy has planned and delivered our John Muir Award, has helped to develop skills and qualities which we, as a school, passionately value and I look forward to watching future sets of Clavering pupils pursue and gain their John Muir Award." Helen O'Brien