The School

Dormers Wells High School is a mixed inner city comprehensive with over 1,000 pupils in the London Borough of Ealing. Almost two thirds of the pupils speak English as a second language and a higher than average proportion receive the Pupil Premium. The current school building was opened in 2013 after the 'Building Schools for the Future' transformation and now has a garden area of about ¾ acre, including an outdoor classroom.

In the beginning

Growing at Dormers Wells High School was instigated by Design Technology teacher, Jerry O’Sullivan, in 2004. He decided to task a group of boys who were finding it difficult to engage in mainstream education with transforming a patch of outside space into a garden. Winning a competition to design the space gave them the budget and confidence to get started.

Help to grow

Funding was the main challenge faced by Dormers Wells in the early years. They decided to start selling their harvest at parents’ evenings, then joined Food Growing Schools: London (FGSL) Marketplace events, turning their harvest into jams, chutneys, sauces and cakes to sell. Embracing London’s multiculturalism, they added a bit of Asian spice and their first batch of ‘Dormers Delight’ produce was a huge hit!

Success

The original group of boys flourished in the garden. Their behaviour improved, they worked well as a team and they took pride in their achievements. The school has won numerous awards and grants for the garden which now includes a wildlife pond, useful for science lessons, a polytunnel and large greenhouse as well as a memorial garden and fruit trees.

“Not only are the pupils learning new skills and building self-esteem, they understand the importance of healthy eating and make enough money from their enterprise to develop the garden and fund their place on the annual school trip.” Jerry O’Sullivan, Design Technology Teacher

79.2% of pupils have improved behaviour or attainment*

* Source: Figures based on evaluation surveys with lead school teachers in Sept 2013 (n=504) and July 2016 (n=241)
Who’s involved?

The popularity of the garden grew and the school decided to offer Level 1 and 2 horticultural courses from City and Guilds to pupils in years nine, 10 and 11. Jerry attended night school for 18 months so he could lead the teaching and recruited an assistant to help in the garden. **Pupils have gained skills for life and some have chosen careers in the field, setting up their own businesses and one former pupil now works at Kew Gardens.**

What next?

Jerry hopes to expand the number of pupils opting to complete their City and Guilds next year, build more raised beds, and is also working on improving engagement with the whole school community and a local junior school who have their own raised bed in the garden.

Growing Enterprise

After selling a few vegetables to parents and staff, the pupils were hooked. They took the lead in developing their school enterprise, deciding what to make from their harvest and how to brand it, with support from the Food Technology and Business Departments – and pupils and staff across the school.

FGSL Top Tips

- Build support, share FGSL research on the benefits of food growing
- Access free FGSL resources including the Grow Your Own Business pack
- Do market research – who are your customers, what & when will they buy?
- Visit or take part in a Marketplace event
- Enter lots of competitions, apply for funding & grants

1 in 4 schools now link food growing to curriculum activities*

www.foodgrowingschools.org