

# ST. BENILDUS COLLEGE – INAUGURAL SCHOOL GARDEN

August 2016 saw the Transition Year students begin the construction of the St. Benildus School Garden. The project has a wide scope. It is **to build an environmentally sustainable school garden that will serve the school and the wider community.** It has the potential to have: **strong educational links, enhance the natural surroundings, raise awareness of environmental concerns and facilitate local to global community action.** To date the project has forged relationships and links with; Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council through the award of an Environment Grant, Johnstown Boys National School, a local Residents Association, a Construction Company operating in the local area, Green Schools, Geography classes undertaking soil samples, 5<sup>th</sup> Year Agricultural Science students who have begun to sow potatoes in part of the vegetable patch under construction and some very enthusiastic 5<sup>th</sup> Year students as an option in Senior P.E.

## Aims and Objectives of the Initiative

- To build a school garden
- To plant trees, bushes and flowers
- To plant and nurture fruit trees and fruit bushes
- To plant and care for a vegetable patch
- To plant and care for a herb garden
- To build and house a polytunnel to nurture seedlings and develop fruit and vegetables
- To create biodiversity by building an insect motel and an environment to encourage wildlife such as birds, squirrels, bees, butterflies and other creatures
- To harvest rainwater
- To create self-sustainable compost (compost heap)
- To educate students in a multitude of disciplines
- To create cross curricular links which strengthens and reinforces educational lessons
- To support and reinforce Department of Education and Skills Initiatives

**A key element is that students carry out all works directly which promotes sustainable community involvement.**

## Intended Outcome

The intended outcome of the project is for all members of the school community to contribute, enjoy and benefit from the creation of a school garden: Students, Teachers, Parents and Families.

The College aims **to enrich the education of the students** through all facets of school life; academic, health and welfare, recreational activities and the growth of individuals and groups in school activities. We offer a **holistic approach to education** and aim **to meet the individual; spiritual, intellectual, moral, artistic, emotional, physical and social needs of each student so that they are better equipped for life. A school garden offers many physical and psychological health benefits for students and adults.**

The Project is for transition year students and other students in our school **to build a school garden from scratch, whereby students complete all works from start to**

**finish.** From; research, garden design, hard landscaping, soft landscaping, building flower beds a paved/stone path, compost heap, a seating area as an outdoor classroom, planting trees and flowers, **weeding, sowing, growing, nurturing, caring and loving nature.**

It will be an '**outside**' **reflective area** and the space can be used in the future to house school graduations whereby families **reflect and rejoice together as a community.**

### **Cross Curricular Integration with other Subjects and School Initiatives**

- A **contemplative area** for Social Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E) and Civic, Social and Political Education (C.S.P.E).
- Integration with **Green Schools.**
- **Science/Biology/Geography;** soils, plants, animals, environment.
- **Transition Year Cookery Module; Healthy Eating,** school canteen, Stillorgan food fair on Wednesdays, **T.Y Mini Company** (hanging baskets, flower trays, window boxes, selling produce). We will utilise all the fruit, vegetables and herbs we will produce.
- **Construction Studies/Design and Communications Graphics (D.C.G);** the design of the garden and wooden structures.
- **Career Guidance;** horticulture, food science, landscaping, agricultural science, construction, agri-business, getting exposure to these career options.
- **Environment;** symbol of nature, growth, community.
- As an alternative option to senior students during traditional **Physical Education (P.E).**
- **Whole School Initiative/Collaborating** between different departments.
- **The school would use some of the flowers each year** for the reception and for graduation ceremonies.

It is envisaged as a **working garden AND a place of contemplation** and relaxation as well – an escape from a pressurised world to a place of calmness and serenity.

### **Rationale and Other Benefits**

- **Improves the quality of life for participants** – students, adults, the school community and wider community groups will benefit both physically and psychologically.
- **Provides a catalyst for neighbourhood and community development** – the school have entered in to discussions with a local residents group to form a partnership to craft and build bird feeders and hopefully other items.
- **Stimulates Social Interaction** – a crucial building block for the successful attainment of self-esteem, confidence, mental health awareness and overall well-being. The stimulus and positive atmosphere of the development of a school garden encourages teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills which are key skills for people to hone.
- **Encourages Self-Reliance** – The school garden produce will be used for the school cookery module in the future. Transition Year students; growing, tending, harvesting

and then cooking their own food, exhibits the sustainable food chain and highlights the transparency between, 'the farm and the fork'.

- **Beautifies Neighbourhoods** – The school garden will encourage and sustain local wildlife, enable outreach programmes in the community and will facilitate the All-Ireland Pollination Plan.
- **Produces Nutritious Food** – our students and their families will directly benefit, students will harvest fruit, vegetables and other yields and sell the produce in the future at a local food fair and to the school canteen, as part of a Transition Year Mini-Company Venture.
- **Reduces Family Food Budgets** – The families of the students and the teachers at our school.
- **Conserves Resources** – We will engage in water harvesting, producing our own compost, using recycled and upcycled materials and aim to become a sustainable environment. We are ambitiously hoping to build our own glasshouse from scratch using a combination of recycled and new materials.
- **Creates opportunity for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education** – Students are the ones building the garden, no contractors or other service providers will play any part. Everything will be completed by the project group. The building and development of the school garden provides active physical exercise and social and environmental recreation. Numerous educational links are present between school subjects and Department of Education and Skills programmes and initiatives.
- **Preserves Green Space** – The project preserves green space and a sustainable green space in an urban built of area. It also provides a sanctuary for wildlife to flourish.
- **Provides opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections** – our project enables social cohesion as in the future school events such as our United Through Sport Day with local Special Olympics groups can be housed in part in our school garden and we also hope to continue to forge links with other community groups for the mutual benefits of everyone in our community.

## Looking Ahead

By the end of the 2016–2017 academic year it is hoped to have; installed and planted the vegetable patches, planted fruit trees and bushes, painted the boundary walls, built a pollytunnel, installed a formal garden entrance gate, completed the construction of a decked area and the further delineation of boundaries and paths. Congratulations to all those Transition Year students, 5<sup>th</sup> Year students and other members of the school community that have been involved to date for their hard work.

**The site at Week 0 – 26/08/2016**



The site at Week 6 – 07/10/2016





**Compost Heap**

**Fence Construction**



## Transition Year students as Owners and Creators









## Construction of the Garden's Perimeter



Squirrel trying out the new fence   Reclaimed Materials   Water Harvesting



## Construction of Vegetable Patch



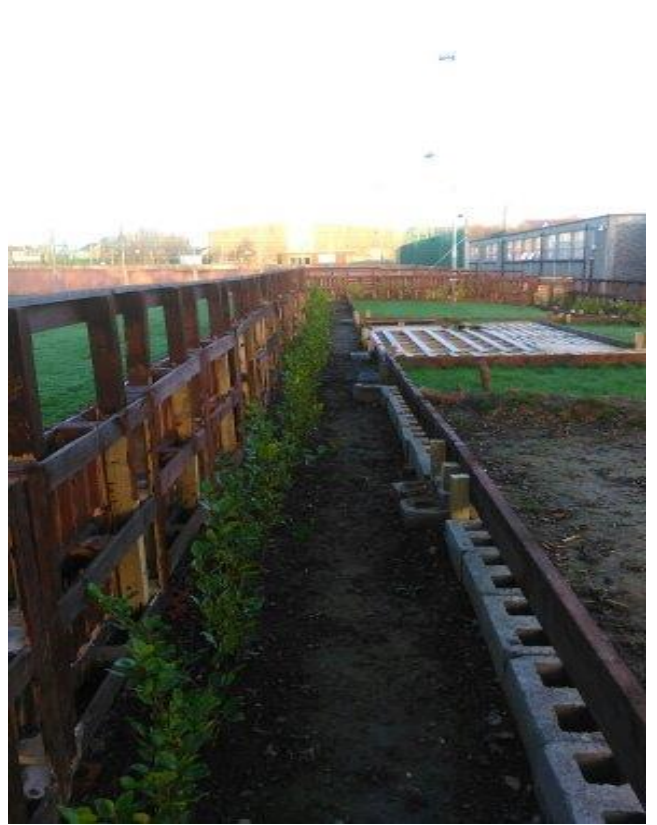
## Spring Bulbs



**Tulip Bed**



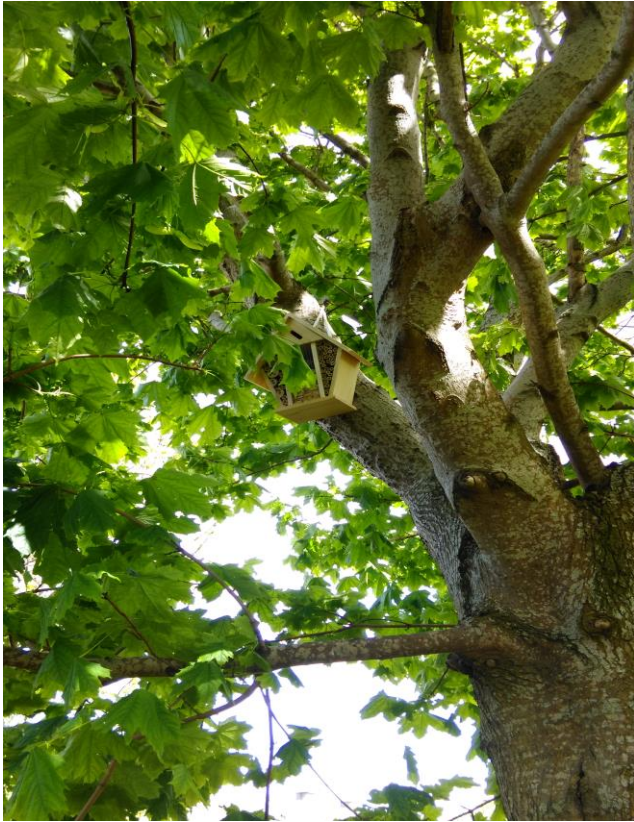
**Completed Fence and Hedge**



**Compost Heap March**



### Bee Box



### Tulip Grove



### Growth of Onions



## Growth of Potatoes



## Health Benefits of Gardening

