

Schools in the Parks Project Updates

August 2009

The Schools in the Parks project is reaching the end of its first year and the Summer holidays are providing some light relief after a busy Summer term, with lots of students heading out in to South London Parks and staff and volunteers taking part in training.

The Schools in the Parks project led a secondary schools workshop in association with the London Environmental Education Forum (LEEF) at Vauxhall City Farm (<http://www.vauxhallcityfarm.org/>). With a quick tour of the farm, it was wonderful to see a small space having such a far reaching effect on many groups in the local community. Participants shared their experiences and discussed a number of case studies from the Schools in the Parks project. The group also headed out to Spring Gardens to try out a couple of activities that could be used to explore a number of themes with students including; sustainability, geometry, sampling techniques and planning investigations. The resources used in this session are soon to be available online.

A short session on secondary school activities was carried out as part of the LEEF AGM. Fourteen educators with a range of experiences came along to sample some activities suitable for 11-16 year olds. Outlines of the 5 activities carried out are soon to be available on this site.

A number of schools headed out during the Summer term into a number of parks as outlined in the previous update. For example, two groups of Year 10 students headed into Brockwell Park to investigate particulate pollution on trees and feeding relationships in the park ponds; students were surprised at the amount of life in a pond that, on first appearances, looked like a lifeless duck pond.

Four schools took part in the '3 Rivers Clean Up', removing Himalayan Balsam from the Ravensbourne river catchment and learning about river systems. The project was a great success with Boris Johnson falling in the river during a volunteer clean up and students receiving many positive comments from members of the public about their positive contribution to the parks. The resources and risk assessments for these sessions are soon to be available on this website.

Through these sessions council officers, environmental educators and rangers gained confidence with working with secondary schools. Teachers were also excited by their experiences and many plan to take more students out to parks in the future.

In the next academic year the project will be putting together a series of formal training units for all the boroughs, and working with more school groups to demonstrate the potential of the parks. Including developing secondary sessions with the Creekside Trust (<http://www.creeksidecentre.org.uk/>) and working with the Friends of Brixton Windmill to promote the use of the heritage site in secondary schools (<http://www.brixtonwindmill.org/>)

Please get in touch if you are interested in getting involved in the project.

email: beth@field-studies-council.org

The results of the "outdoor learning survey" carried out at the start of the SITP project have been now been summarised. [The full report is available for download.](#)

The key findings are below:

Key Findings

- Half of those surveyed currently take students out of the classroom, with KS3 students making predominant use for the school grounds, and KS4 students making greater use of their local parks.
- Travel to out of classroom sites was always by walking, and the journey took an average of 5 minutes
- The main consideration for the majority of those surveyed was safety. However Timing issues and educational value of a visit were also important.
- Ecology was thought to be the most appropriate way to link the use of parks in to the curriculum, however half of the responses received were from science/biology teachers.
- Teachers were positive about the effect the new KS3 curriculum and GCSE's specifications would have on the number of out of classroom experiences.

April 2009

With the Summer term approaching and the weather improving teachers and pupils are showing enthusiasm for getting out of the classroom and learning in their parks.

- London Wildlife Trust are going to be running newly developed curriculum linked secondary school sessions in Southwark's Dulwich Park, in partnership with LB Southwark and the schools in the Parks project. Half day sessions will be run in the park, details of how to book in for a school session can be found below.
[Find out more](#) (PDF document)
- The Creekside Education Trust, based in Lewisham, are working with SITP to run free secondary education sessions as part of the '3 river clean up' partnership event in Lewisham and Greenwich to improve the Ravensbourne river system.
Further information about the event can be found on the Thames 21 website www.thames21.org.uk/3riverscleanup . If you are a school and would like to book one of the free hands on education sessions, all the information you need can be found in the document below.
[Find out more](#) (PDF document)
- La Retraite school in Lambeth took their year 10 BTEC students out into Agnes Riley gardens to learn about freshwater ecosystems. Many of the students showed real enthusiasm for the work and were surprised at the diversity of life living in a pond in their local park.
Theresa Hoare, development and education officer for Lambeth's Brockwell Park, is working closely with the project and St. Martin-in-the-fields school to run a series of science sessions in Brockwell across their GCSE and BTEC classes. They will be out in the park studying pollution and ecosystems after the Easter holidays.
- Crown Woods school in Greenwich are going to be developing some innovative work with Jonathon Bangs (Greenwich Parks outreach officer) to explore the use of GIS in the Key stage 3 syllabus. They are going to be taking their year 7 geography classes out in to Eltham Park , using digital photography and GPS systems to map the environmental quality of the area. They are also hoping to get their Year 10 eco group involved in Eltham park, working with the local community towards their John Muir Discovery Awards.

In addition to getting students out into parks, the website is soon to be updated with a number of resources. These will include relevant health and safety information, example risk assessments, and an interactive map to help locate your nearest secondary school or park.

February 2009

The schools in the parks (SITP) project has been up and running since September 2008.

Secondary schools in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark have been asked what activities already take place outside in their local area and what they need to enable them to do more. There has been a great response to the survey with 16 schools taking the time to complete the survey. A key issue raised by schools was health and safety. We have therefore made this a priority for the project and are soon to be writing activity specific risk assessments for parks across South East London.

A primary focus of this project is the outdoor educators, park staff and volunteers working in greenspaces across the boroughs. They have shown great enthusiasm for getting more young people using parks. The interests and skills of these groups are varied and will be a great resource for schools, who highlighted the need for support and expert knowledge when teaching outside.

One school in Southwark has started to take steps towards creating a whole school approach to using their local park. Although the process will take time, they are trying to make cross-curricular links and are putting together a virtual learning environment (VLE) to support students when they use the park. They are hoping to take out KS3 students this summer to carry out science and geography based activities.

The project wants to support as many schools and parks as possible, so if you are a teacher and have yet to complete a survey, please [download the survey](#) (Word Doc, 2mb) and email back to beth@field-studies-council.org.

If you work in a park or are a member of a friends of park group in South London and want to work with a local secondary school then email me at the same address.