**Littlest volunteers helping to improve village life**

Even the littlest volunteers can have a big impact on a community, and that’s certainly the case in Ballinahown where children from the local preschool and national school are heavily involved in activities in the village.

The children of Stepping Stones Preschool regularly use the community polytunnel where they grow fruit, vegetables and flowers in the raised flower beds, while the children of Ballinahown NS are involved in several aspects of community life.

They also regularly use the community polytunnel and this year they grew tomato plants; vegetables from seed; herbs; and perennial flowers, which were later transplanted to flower beds in the village. Towards the end of the school year, the children had the opportunity to harvest some of their salad produce and had a tasting afternoon at the school.

The school’s first and second class students planted salad boxes which they looked after in school and learned that planting herbs alongside salads is an effective non-chemical way of pest control as snails and slugs are deterred by strong-smelling herbs such as coriander, sage, oregano and chives.

The children also assisted with the sowing of a wildflower meadow on the school grounds using native wildflower seeds and made their own wildflower bombs to take home, allowing them to create wildflower areas in their gardens.

The creation of large-scale bug hotels was another initiative undertaken by the children this year. The 5th and 6th class students created designs for the structures, which were then built by the village’s CE workers using donated recycled materials before being installed in the school grounds adjacent to the wildflower area. The children researched the materials needed to attract the various bugs and insects before filling the hotels, which they named: Bugs-on Bay Hotel; Four Seasons Bee & Bee; Bugingham Palace; and Woodlice Lodge.

The schoolchildren are very aware of the village’s participation in Entente Florale. As they are eager to show their involvement in village life, they have worked with their teacher, Michael Fagan, to create a video that will be displayed to the jury on Saturday, July 13th.

Principal of Ballinahown NS, Tom Keena, said: “We were delighted to link in with Ballinahown Community Development on these projects. As a school, we are working on teaching the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and everything we do with Ballinahown Community Development supports this.

“The children have become so interested in community development that they spent several break times towards the end of the year creating a city made from stones in the schoolyard. They named it Brickville and central to their design were a park, walkways through the city, roads, a train track, a church, restaurants, a bank, a museum and a mayor’s house. It was fantastic to see their enthusiasm and I was so impressed with how they worked together that we provided additional stones for them to grow their city. While it might be considered imaginative play, I think it demonstrates how much they have learned about sustainable development. The future is safe with these aspirational town planners,” he added.

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