

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM HERITAGE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Case Study

BOTANIC GARDEN

Getting the most from this case study.....

- When you read this case study, you will find it useful to have a copy of the Quality Indicators or the Quality Badge SEF to hand.
- You will see that the case study has sections of text highlighted in bold. This text indicates an aspect of practice at this organisation that can be directly linked to a Quality Indicator.
- At the end of a section of bold text or at the end of the sentence containing that text, you will see a reference number in brackets. To find out what that number means, go to the last page of the case study, which contains a table listing all of these reference numbers. Next to each reference number there is a Quality Indicator number/s.
- Look up the Quality Indicator number/s on your SEF and to find out how a specific aspect of practice at this organisation might help them to get the Quality Badge.

Introduction

Alison Holt is education and interpretation officer at Belmont Botanic Garden. Belmont is a small garden, run on sustainable principles as an educational charity and situated outside a major UK city. As well as an outside collection specialising in UK plant species, Belmont has an arboretum, a wildlife pond and two glasshouses that are open to the public. There is also a small visitor centre, incorporating a café, shop and space for occasional exhibitions. With a small permanent staff, they rely heavily on volunteers to help run the garden.

Recently Alison was contacted by teacher Evan Thomas, of Riverside Primary School, to arrange a visit by a class of thirty Year 6 children who were following their Key Stage 2 science curriculum and also participating in Riverside's Eco-Schools programme.

Just under half the children at Riverside, an urban community primary school, are of non-European ethnicity and a significant number have English as an additional language. The pupils are drawn from multi-faith and non-faith backgrounds. The proportion of children qualifying for free school meals is above the national average and two pupils in Evan Thomas' class are deemed to have Special Educational Needs. Another child is a wheelchair user.

Description of Practice

I'd already met Evan at a Twilight Evening we'd held for teachers at the garden, as part of our **strategy to engage with local schools (1)**. Following this and having visited our **website**, which describes the full range of amenities and attractions offered by the garden **(2)**, Evan decided to bring a Riverside group to Belmont for the first time.

I'm not a teacher, so the Twilight Evening enabled me **to learn from teachers** what they expected to achieve on a visit, **how we could assist their pupils' learning** and how they would **evaluate the visit (3)**. I used this **feedback** to align the garden's education strategy more closely with the National Curriculum **(4)**. And in order to understand the context in which current education policy is framed, I also made sure I was familiar with the Government's *Children's Plan*, the *Every Child Matters* programme and the *Learning Outside the Classroom* manifesto **(5)**.

At Belmont everyone involved in educational contact with children receives **regular** in-house **training**, modelled on the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) **(6)**. We're also all required to have up-to-date **Criminal Record Bureau (CRB)** clearances and we've ensured that the garden's **Child Protection and Safeguarding** procedures conform to Charity Commission and Local Child Safeguarding Board requirements **(7)**. Belmont's **public liability insurance** is up-to-date **(8)**. Belmont is currently **reviewing** and updating all its **written policies** and **activities** to bring them, wherever possible, into line with current best practice **(9)**.

Following our phone call Evan, as group leader and designated contact teacher, downloaded the current **Educational Visits pack (10)** from Belmont's website. This incorporates a booking form and offers a varied menu of learning opportunities, activities, sessions and evaluative models that are matched to National Curriculum Key Stages 1 – 3 **(11)**. The booking form requests details of the class size, estimated arrival and departure times and a brief visit plan. Chosen options from the learning opportunities menu are also to be indicated on the form. The pack offers clear, accurate and up-to-date guidelines on the garden's charging scheme for school visits and the booking procedure **(12)**. Additionally, it outlines Belmont's Health and Safety policy (which complies with all current legal standards) **(13)**, its photographic policy and the role and competencies of volunteers **(14)**. Details of downloadable educational resources, especially for self-led groups, are also available.

On receipt of Riverside's booking form, I arranged for Evan to carry out his own pre-visit **risk assessment**, in compliance with the health and safety guidelines in the Educational Visit pack **(15)**. These **identify potential** structural or physical **hazards** around the garden such as the pond, tall or unstable trees and the glasshouses. Other risks include allergic or poison reactions to contact with, or ingestion of, certain plants. I also advised Evan to ensure that his party was accompanied by a qualified first-aider.

During Evan's risk-assessment visit, in which all the potential hazards were identified and assessed, we agreed our respective roles and responsibilities as visitor and host under Belmont's **safety management procedures (16)**. Evan inspected the **facilities and equipment** described in the Educational Visit pack to confirm that they were **suitable** for his pupils and **in good working order**. These included, in the visitor centre, the **secure education room** we'd set aside for Riverside's **exclusive use**. This was furnished with child-sized tables and chairs and equipped with IT facilities, microscopes and ample supplies of drawing materials and stationery. I was also able to show him that the toilets and washing facilities were accessible, functioning and regularly cleaned **(17)**.

Evan's visit was an opportunity for me to check whether any outstanding special educational needs (SEN), access, mobility or other social inclusion issues remained **(18)**. I asked him to ensure that the children brought their picnic lunches in **bio-degradable** or **recyclable** packaging **(19)**, in accordance with our environmental policy. A minimum ratio of adults to children was also agreed (in this Key Stage 2 group that meant 1 adult: 10 children) **(20)**.

Evan had chosen our *Go-Green: Introduction to Sustainability* tour as the framework for his class visit and we discussed how the children could best use the garden to identify sustainability issues in order to support their learning experience (21).

On the morning of Riverside's visit I briefed my volunteers, highlighting potential health, safety, inclusion and mobility challenges. I asked them to observe and **note any positive or negative aspects** of the group's experience during the *Go-Green* tour for our post-visit evaluation (22). Then I made a final check on facilities and equipment in the visitor centre, having already 'walked' the *Go-Green* tour to check that the signage and interpretation was accessible and readable (23).

When the Riverside group arrived I introduced myself, welcomed them to the garden and took them to the visitor centre, where I pointed out the toilet and other facilities and introduced the volunteers. Using **simple, straightforward language** (24), I explained that Belmont was a scientific garden, containing precious plants, and asked the children to respect the garden and other garden users. After a short health and safety briefing, I outlined Belmont's sustainability policy and introduced the *Go-Green* tour.

To start everyone thinking, I asked the group to note down or draw all the 'green' ideas or things they could remember. It's an exercise I repeated when the children returned at the end of the tour, partly for our own **assessment** of visitor awareness but also to assist the children's **evaluation** of their own learning (25). I distributed visitor maps and then, on a large-scale map, pointed out the location of **recycling and compost bins**, together with the **solar panels** and **wind turbines** that generate Belmont's **renewable energy**. Since Belmont is committed to **sustainable water use**, I explained how new technologies, irrigation and cultivation practices were being piloted in the garden to minimise water waste and test habitat viability (26). The children were then divided into groups of eco-detectives, each group assisted by a volunteer and equipped with clipboards and checklists. With every group accompanied by an adult member of Riverside's party, they set off around the garden to investigate Belmont's eco-credentials and search for evidence that plants and habitats were struggling to adapt to climate change.

Although Belmont's health and safety provision was not tested, a volunteer **noted** that wheelchair access to the older of the two glasshouses was impaired by lack of space. Subsequently I **logged** this in my Visitor Feedback Folder for **action** (27).

Back at the visitor centre at the end of the tour, I facilitated a brief plenary session to capture and summarise some of the children's learning. And in the light of Ofsted's 2008 Learning Outside the Classroom report, which found that pupils learned most from their visits when they were linked back to curriculum activities in school, I also offered to send Evan any follow-up materials or information he required.

Before they returned to Riverside, I gave every child a postcard and asked them to colour the cartoon face that most closely represented their **feelings about the visit**. These were collected, together with a simple **visitors feedback** form from the adults (28). Evan had already agreed to return our **school visit feedback** form, focusing on **learning expectations** and **outcomes**, the **quality of sessions and activities**, **value for money** and any **recommendations** for improvement. We had explained that all feedback would inform Belmont's **regular review** of its practices and policies (29). The Riverside group completed their visit and depart safely – without stragglers!

Please see the next page for the Quality Indicator Reference List

Reference List

Reference no.	Quality Indicator
1	2a, 5a
2	2a, 3a
3	4a
4	4c
5	4a
6	3e, 3f
7	6d
8	6c
9	5a, 5d
10	1f, 2a, 5a
11	1b, 1c, 1e, 3a
12	2b
13	6b
14	3e, 3f
15	6a
16	1a, 6a
17	3b, 3d, 6d
18	1d
19	5c
20	1a, 6a
21	3c
22	4a, 4b
23	3b, 6d
24	5a
25	1e, 4a, 4b
26	5a, 5c
27	4a, 4b, 4c, 5d
28	4b
29	4a, 4b, 4c

Further information

For more information about LOtC, the Quality Badge and learning through heritage, visit the following websites:

www.lotc.org.uk

www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

www.gem.org.uk

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