

Appendix A. Ballycraigy Teacher Interview

Interview with Jocelyn Brown, Teacher and Ballycraigy Eco-Schools Coordinator.

- **What has surprised you about this program or practice?**

The school's environmental success has increasingly been recognised by different bodies ranging from the local council to the Royal Horticultural Society. Eco-Schools supplied the framework to base all our work on. It provides major topic areas for us to develop and we certainly succeeded in Outdoor Learning and Biodiversity. Other areas such as managing Litter, Waste, Transport and Healthy Living were vastly improved in our school over the years. Our dogged determination and consistent leadership have helped us get this far. Much support and encouragement from our partners was certainly valued, thus creating behaviour changes in the pupils who became involved in the projects.

- **What did you learn along the way that sticks with you?**

There is no harm in asking people! The involvement of the school community has amazed me and the many friendships that have evolved out of it. Of course our successes and wins in competitions stand out, but hopefully the next generation will learn from all the activities that they have taken part in. Both the teachers, the community and the pupils have had many new experiences which have combined together to produce a wonderful project. There's now a real community ethos around outdoor activities in the school.

- **What were one or two of the most important outcomes?**

The most important outcomes include developing creativity and problem solving abilities that we can tap in to, especially from the pupils, teachers, parents and local community. There is a 'depth' in each of these groupings which we continually tap into. The skill of the project leader was spotting this and providing goals for each group to aim at so we could achieve these high standards. When we did not win a gardening competition, we questioned why. This made us evaluate our standards. We wanted to win it the next year – a new heritage garden resulted! We did win the following year.

Another outcome was the fun and 'craic' we had. Everyone in the school, regardless of their position, got involved and got their hands dirty together.

We have now our own separate bank account to manage and deploy, and this gave us independence.

- **If this program or practice is ongoing, why is it important? What do you hope it will accomplish over time?**

Certainly this practice is ongoing. The original grandfather, who helped us as we embarked in the early years, has now retired. It was daunting to set out on our own but as each school year has progressed, the school Board of Governors, the staff, the Parent/Teacher Association and the local community have seen the benefits of outdoor learning. They have fully backed each new project and continue to source new helpers to support the continuity of environmental education. They have noted the benefits of working outdoors and the relationship between outdoor learning and pupil behaviour, especially for some boys as they progressed up the school; they like the sense of responsibility it gives them. This all fits in with our school's UNCRC ethos and is reflected in what we do every day. The 'feel good' factor has been broadcast by the children as they proudly bring groups around their school grounds on 'open days'. They have been empowered to share good practice. This ethos requires nurturing and all those involved in the School's Eco projects look out for one another.