



Feel Good by Growing

PRU Pilot Overview



Feel Good by Growing: Establishing significantly improved wellbeing for pupils with complex Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs

Main Findings

- Pupil wellbeing scores improved from a baseline significantly below the national average in October 2023 to scores in line with the national average by December 2023, showing engagement with plants and nature can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of young people with complex Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.
- This step-change in pupil wellbeing corresponded with pupils taking part in introductory sensory experiences with herb plants and pupil voice being front and centre as pupils discussed and selected the wellbeing for gardening focus they wished to pursue.
- The improvement in pupil wellbeing was sustained at the end of the project and was evident for girls and boys, showing the breadth of potential for plants and gardening to support pupil wellbeing in specialist settings.
- Staff reported that their own wellbeing had also improved, along with that of their colleagues, showing engagement with plants in schools and educational settings can have far-reaching benefits for the whole school community.

“I find it heart-warming that there is a project like this aimed at children who often have fewer opportunities to experience being valued and welcomed to be a part of something.”

- Staff member

Overview

The RHS *Feel Good by Growing* pilot project ran in 15 Pupil Referral Units and specialist settings supporting pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs from October 2023 - May 2024.

The project aimed to support and improve pupil wellbeing by growing and caring for plants. Much of the pilot took place during the autumn and winter months, a time when growing and gardening outside can be harder to achieve. With this in mind, support for both outdoor and indoor gardening was provided to allow pupils to have regular contact with plants and growing.



There was also a strong focus on pupil voice, with children and young people empowered to choose how to support their own wellbeing by identifying a particular gardening focus for their project. Action research areas chosen by pupils included gardening to raise money for charity, gardening showing resilience and empathy towards each other and nature, and creating an indoor mindfulness garden.

Pupils completed surveys at the beginning, midpoint and end of the project in order to establish and analyse any measurable changes in wellbeing scores, with 332 pupil surveys completed during the pilot. Staff also completed a survey and were invited to share their experiences during staff focus groups.

“I stop thinking about things. It makes me calm”

- Pupil

“To see the sense of accomplishment that happened, just digging out a tree stump into lifting it above their head.... It’s incredible”

- Staff member

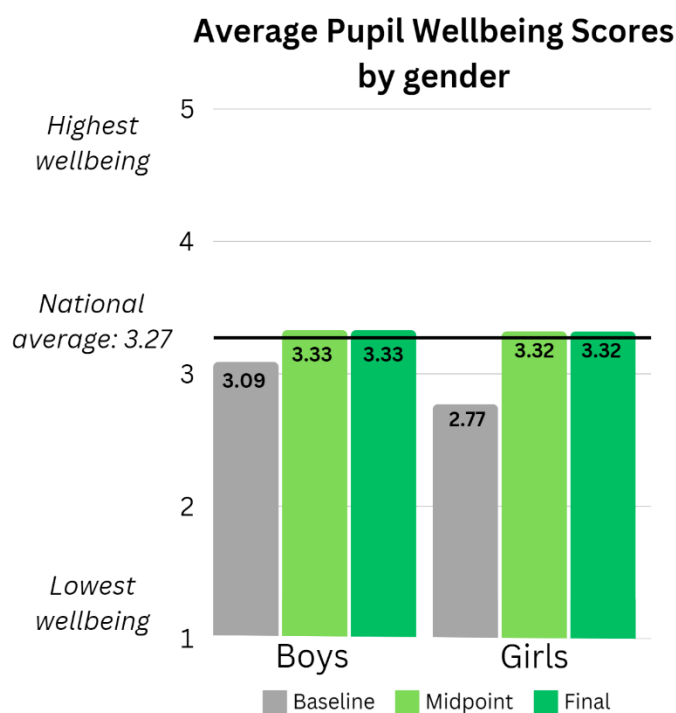
Key project features

- Herb plants and accompanying activities sent to PRUs as an introduction to the project
- Online resources including materials supporting the development of emotional literacy and self-regulation through gardening
- Online 1:1 horticultural advice sessions with RHS experts
- Online project meetings with opportunities for PRU staff to network and share ideas
- £1,000 grants to support staff release time to attend meetings and co-develop resources
- £200 grants for PRUs to purchase resources to support growing and gardening



Measuring project impact

Pupil wellbeing was measured at the beginning, midpoint and end of the project using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, and independently evaluated by ImpactEd Evaluation.



Wellbeing scores for girls and boys showed a significant improvement in both groups. At baseline, both groups were below the national average benchmark (which includes pupils in mainstream schools).

By the midpoint, wellbeing scores for both groups increased to be in line with the national average and this improvement was sustained at the end of the project.

Pupils who reported having touched a seed or plant in the month leading up to each survey had a higher wellbeing score at each stage of the project, implying that those who engage directly with nature have a higher level of wellbeing than those who do not.

Positive project impacts related to pupil wellbeing identified by staff included:

- Improved social and communication skills
- Increased confidence, achievement and self-esteem
- The benefits of the enjoyable, relaxing and mindful aspects of gardening

Staff survey responses showed the frequency of gardening or growing plants with pupils during the project had more than doubled. Autumn term figures rose from 23% staff gardening or growing plants at least once a week with pupils in 2022 to 46% in the first term of *Feel Good by Growing*. This increase was magnified in the spring term with 77% staff gardening or growing plants at least once a week with pupils, up from 31% in the spring term the previous year.

100% staff said they would recommend the project to other PRUs, showing the strong recognition of the difference made by this approach to supporting the wellbeing of pupils with complex Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs.



“I don’t have a garden at home in my flat block. So I enjoy being outside”

- Pupil

“Being green for me is being calm and ready. Being green for my plant is like actually being green, being healthy and growing”

- Pupil


Future potential

We are making the project resources widely available via the [RHS Campaign for School Gardening](#) website and hope to extend the project to PRUs and other specialist settings nationally so that more children, young people and staff can benefit from this pupil-steered approach to improving wellbeing through plants, growing and gardening.



























Appendix


Examples of resources provided to PRUs











How I feel about gardening

How do I feel?	What is it about gardening that makes me feel this way?	
  tired bored	It takes a long time. 	It seems pointless. 
  happy calm	It's too quiet. 	Something else? 
  worried frustrated	It's peaceful. 	I can see things grow over time. 
  panicked angry	I am helping nature. 	Something else? 
	I don't know what to do. 	I don't like being outside. 
	I don't like getting dirty. 	Something else? 
	Sometimes it goes wrong. 	I don't like being near insects. 
	It feels out of control. 	Something else? 

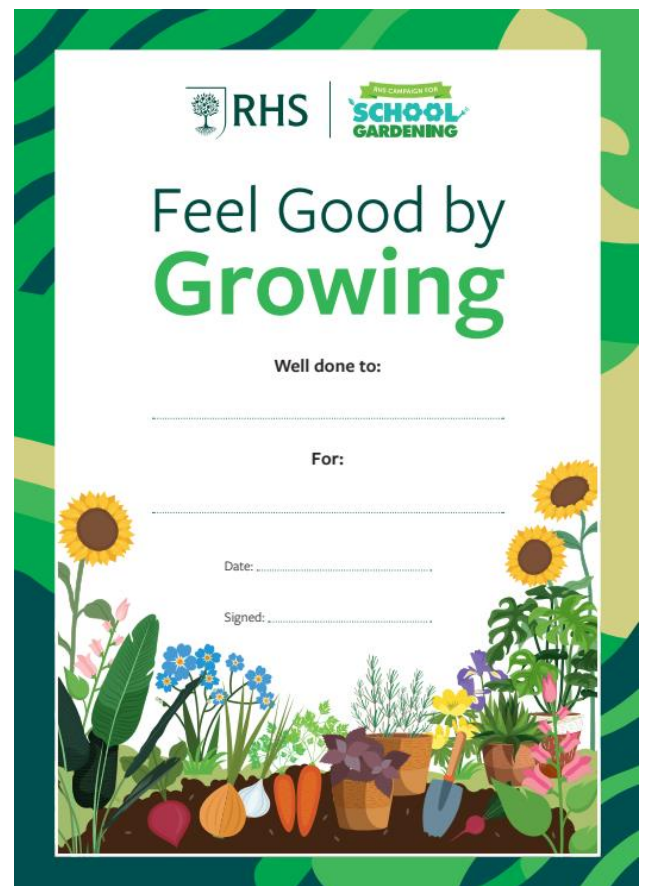
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How can gardening help me?

When I feel...	I can try...
  tired bored	
  happy calm	
  worried frustrated	
  panicked angry	

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Feel Good by Growing Participants

ALP Sittingbourne, Sittingbourne, Kent
Haromonize Academy, Liverpool, Merseyside
iCollege West Berkshire, Newbury, Berkshire
Launchpad KS4 PRU, St Helens, Merseyside
Manchester Secondary PRU, Manchester
Robson House (Camden Primary Pupil Referral Unit), London
Rowhill School, Aldershot, Hampshire
St Peter's Centre, Egham, Surrey
St Wilfrid's Academy, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
The Elland Academy, Leeds, West Yorkshire
The Levett School, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
Whitehouse PRU, Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire
The Woodlands, Ferryhill, Co Durham
Voyage Learning Campus, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset
Youth Challenge Academy (PRU), Bolton Impact Trust, Bolton, Lancashire

A full version of the Feel Good by Growing evaluation report is available at
<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/info-sheet/pupil-referral-unit-toolkit>

