



Yorkshire Gardens Trust
School Visit Report

Name of Committee Member or Trustee	Christine Wood
Date of Visit:	11.11.2025
Name of School & Contact	St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Ben Palmer (Assistant Head, Outdoor Learning and Mental Health Lead) Mrs Hargreave (Gardening Club Leader)
YGT Support Received	St Joseph's have been members of YGT since 2012. They are extremely proactive in securing our offers and grants, which have included a range of books, an apple tree, a bee hotel, bird feeder, watering cans, plants and seeds, a compost bin and Grounds Development Awards (GDAs) in June 2019, March 2022 and spring 2025.
Purpose/Focus of visit: To see the 'Living Wall', which was funded by the GDA St Joseph's received earlier this year. To see how St Joseph's have used other YGT offers.	
<p>St Joseph's is totally committed to creating a school environment which is 'nature rich'. Classes have tree names e.g. oak, hawthorn. Staff actively bring the outside inside and classrooms have beautiful and vibrant displays, bordered by foliage. There are plants, log and mushroom-themed seats for pupils, alongside real logs, branches from trees found after storms and in one classroom a living tree! Classrooms have low level music and subdued lighting, (including 'twinkly' lighting to enhance displays) which creates calm and purposeful learning environments.</p> <p>The school grounds include a sloped field, playground, Magic Garden and The Burrow. The Magic Garden is a partly enclosed area which aims to be a quiet haven for pupils who find playtimes overwhelming. In the Magic Garden they can explore a range of sensory plants or just sit and chat. Older pupils are on duty during these times to ensure that plants are handled carefully. The sensory plants are growing in wooden planters and staff have learned that pupils find the sensory experience more effective and calming if each planter only contains one type of plant. For example, one planter had rosemary, another thyme and another lavender.</p>	



There are also hanging baskets in the Magic Garden – 1 per class. Each basket hangs below the name of its class, and the pupils are responsible for planting up and caring for their basket. The baskets are re-planted each season.



Ben Palmer has written an outdoor curriculum, which has a progression of skills. Classes have timetabled sessions for outdoor learning. There are a range of reading books linked to the outdoor learning. These are labelled and kept separately from other books in school. St Joseph's value the books they have received from YGT!

There are two clubs at St Joseph's which focus on outdoor learning. These are a Forest Schools Club called Tree Huggers, led by a Forest Schools trained member of staff and a Gardening Club, which is hugely popular and heavily over-subscribed. More staff in the school have expressed a wish to complete Forest School training.

There is a complete commitment to enhancing the school grounds and creating a range of opportunities for pupils. For example, Yorkshire Willow will be visiting very soon. They will be supplying the willow and working with pupils to create a willow igloo-type structure. They have also applied to the RHS Wellbeing Project where each class will have a houseplant to nurture.



St Joseph's has high numbers of SEND pupils and they gain great enjoyment and instant fulfilment when involved in outdoor activities.

All improvements made to the outside environment at St Joseph's is self-funded and Ben spends inordinate amounts of time completing grant applications. Three years ago, the school received a number of trees from the Woodland Trust. These are now maturing well.



There are new raised beds with good quality compost, ready to be planted in the spring. These beds will form part of the 'welly to belly' initiative.



The school has a range of resources for pupils when they are involved in outside learning or Gardening Club. The resources include wellies in a variety of sizes!



During the visit I met with 4 pupils from the Gardening Club, Poppy, Leo, Luci and Layla.

Poppy is often on duty in the Magic Garden and told me that she tells pupils to, 'Be gentle!'

Comments from the children:

'The Gardening Club is lots of fun.'

'You get to do lots – digging, planting, weeding.'

'I feel proud when people say nice things about what we do.'

'Everyone is welcome'.

Layla and Poppy now grow vegetables at home. Layla spoke of her excitement when she harvested potatoes, onions and pumpkins!

Layla's Mum works in the school and said she thought that the outdoor learning and Gardening Club were helping the environment and it was interesting for the children to learn about nature.

St Joseph's were successful in their application for a Grounds Development Award in March this year. With this award they installed a 'living wall' in a walkway that is passed and seen by large numbers of pupils and parents each day. Some of the plants have been replaced due to the very hot summer. There are plans to add a simple irrigation system to ensure that the plants are kept watered even when school is closed.



Many of the outdoor learning activities are recorded on X at #skjoutdoorlearning.

What would help St Joseph's

Ben has a wish list which includes:

- a greenhouse,
- more good quality tools,

- **adult-size gardening gloves,**
- **mulch and compost,**
- **seed balls, plants for the wellbeing plot.**

Also useful would be grow guides, including information about how to care for vegetables, the most appropriate times for planting and harvesting.

A big thank you to Ben, Mrs Hargreave, Poppy, Layla, Leo and Luci for giving up their time to show me around the school and the lovely grounds at St Joseph's and for talking so enthusiastically about outdoor learning and Gardening Club.