



## Mill Water Sensory Orchard

### Newsletter 2015

As our first year at Bicton comes to end, I would like to welcome you to our Orchard newsletter. We hope to issue updates on this exciting project every term throughout 2016.

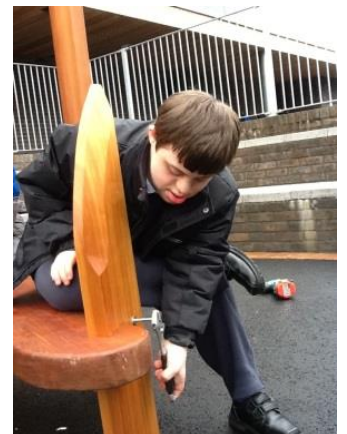
Mill Water School moved to its new premises in January 2015. The new school came with its own established Orchard and, well before the move, we decided to develop it as a sensory space for our children. We wanted to involve as many of the older children as possible in the planning, design, creation and maintenance of the site, which meant using the space as an outdoor classroom right from the start.

Creating a space that is both accessible to all our pupils and engaging on all sensory levels hasn't been easy, but the children have proved well up for the challenge!

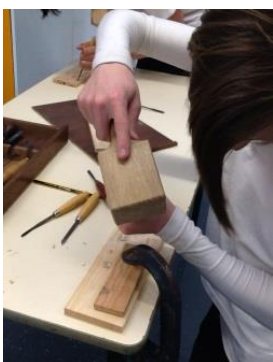
Here are some of our achievements to date:



**January:** A small team from Class 8 began by constructing and placing the storyteller's chair, providing the Orchard with a focal point.



**March:** A larger team from across the school began landscaping the area, moving existing turf around to create paths and to prepare for a new path. Alongside this, they started developing the area around the story teller's chair, building 'stump seats' that act as both balance equipment and seating. This activity formed part of Mill Water's enrichment programme.



**April:** Class 7 began work on the Tactile Rail. This is a rail designed to enable people with visual impairment and those who have difficulty walking to access the site more easily. This is a long term project. The children worked out their designs and hand-carved them onto the rail.



**May:** Contractors put in the main path, through the middle of the Orchard, enabling wheelchair access to the main areas.



**July:** In early July the PTFA arranged for a Sidmouth Herald reporter and photographer to come to the school to promote a concert by the **LaLa Choir**, featuring the **Sassy Sing and Sign Choir**. This took place at All Saints Church in Sidmouth. An article appeared in the Sidmouth Herald and was picked up by the **Norman Family Trust** who contacted the school and asked us to make an application as they wanted to support the Orchard project. The concert was a huge success, raising £634.08, and the **Norman Family Trust** granted us a further £1000. Thank you to everyone involved in both the concert and writing the application form.

**June:** Disaster!! We thought that the notorious giant hogweed was present in the Orchard and all activities had to cease for a time. We later established that we had hogweed, rather than giant hogweed, and activities resumed in September.



**September:** Two teams fitted the Orchard's first two Sound Posts. These are interactive, motion sensitive, solar powered posts that can be programmed to tell parts of a story, give information or produce music. They form part of the wider multi-sensory open access plan, enabling children to navigate the site by sound.



Several groups, including the 6th Form, an Enrichment team and a Forest School Team, worked on various tasks including a great turf moving event (wheelbarrows lent by the Horticulture Team at Bicton College and Branching Out), clearing overenthusiastic undergrowth, painting the shed and preparing for Apple Week.



**October:** Apple Week!!! Our first annual event to celebrate harvest time and the asset we have in a School Orchard. Children took part in apple related events across the school, including weighing and measuring, art, story and cooking. The main event was, of course, harvesting and pressing the apples, with every child in the school taking part. **The press was lent by the Foundation Learning Team at Bicton College.**



We pressed nearly 500 litres, the juice was delicious and we drank plenty of it during the day. Everyone took a bottle home. We also held a non-uniform day on the last day of half term, raising a further £54 for the Orchard.



**November:** Small tasks, including designing and constructing our own bird feeding area, giant insect hotel and a dry den for the use of the lower school. We began preparing to put in the fence posts (**kindly donated by Mole Valley Farmers**) for the Tactile Rail.



**December:** Fencing! Work has begun in earnest on the Tactile Rail with two teams from across the school putting in the fence posts for the rail; heavy work in the cold, but very satisfying.

**We have many plans for the coming year including finishing the various paths and rails, taking part in the Big Schools Birdwatch in February, creating a Tree Harp with artist Michael Fairfax, learning about tree care and maintenance and exciting developments during next year's Apple Week!**

**Many thanks to all our friends, supporters, the PTFA, Bicton College and, of course, the children and staff of Mill Water School for your generosity, enthusiasm and hard work.**