



Thomas Johnson Lower School
Excellence and Enjoyment

Project 2018: Willow Dome and Surrounding Sensory Border

Title: willow dome and surrounding sensory border

Describe the project

To plant a willow dome as a living structure on our school playground, with a simple sensory border to one side of the area. We wish to develop the use of and appreciation of our outdoor space by developing a 'forest school' approach with the children. It will fit with our ethos of using our outdoor space to enhance children's learning. It will be something that the children are involved in both planting and maintaining. We hope the dome will create both an outside classroom and shady shelter, and that the border (with the use of the sensory trail marker kit) will promote a number of learning skills.

This is a project which has grown and developed over the year. Originally planned as a simple border with a separate willow dome, thanks to the inspiration of one of our teachers who has Forest School training, the project expanded when the school needed to rethink its plan to provide a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). The original planned site of the MUGA was an unused, overgrown and neglected area, consisting of uneven paving slabs with some surrounding fencing. When quotes came in for converting this area to become a MUGA, the cost ran into tens of thousands and was deemed unviable in that site.

It was decided to re-think this area, to make use of the existing fences which surrounded it, to re-lay paving slabs and create a larger sensory garden here instead. In order that the facility was fully inclusive for all of our pupils, the pathways needed to be wheelchair friendly, and the idea of both low and raised beds took shape, to enable all children to actively enjoy the garden.

The Marston Vale Grant has enabled us to quickly realise this plan, and we have created an enclosed garden. Additionally parents have provided some planting, and the final plan is for the area to have small trees (e.g. cherry), herbs and flowers.

The Willow Dome arrived in December, and staff have managed to create a second dome out of the off-cuts, which is sited in the Early Years outdoor area. We hope both domes will take.

More plants will be purchased in the Spring, together with the trail marker kit.

Our thanks go to the Forest of Marston Vale Community Fund for helping us with this wonderful project.

Marian Haines, Headteacher



Sensory Garden looking outwards to main playground area



Willow dome newly constructed



Herb garden in raised bed



Children's rock garden



Sensory garden looking inwards



Wild flowers raised bed



Additional willow dome in Early Years Garden