

Lugden Hill Charitable Trust

There is a frenetic excitement as the 26 children run around the grassy area picking up carrots, parsnips and potatoes. As they rush back waving their edible trophies, the seven- and eight-year-olds are animated, engaged and - most importantly - having fun.

This is the end activity of the Year 3 visit to Manor Farm, East Winch in North Norfolk. The previous two hours had been spent walking from the barn, where the group had first arrived, to a carrstone (a sandstone) quarry approximately a mile away.

Several AFCP charity members support farm visits for schools. This blog describes one of the visits facilitated by Lugden Hill Charity.

AFCP Member, Lugden Hill Charity, was set up in 2018 for the advancement of science and research in agriculture and horticulture, and education and training in those fields. They also support community and environmental projects, particularly in West Norfolk.

On that walk, the pupils had viewed on-farm quarries at different stages of development. They had seen an open quarry with lorries and diggers working to extract the local carrstone, which is used in road and building construction. They had then seen a hay meadow rich with biodiversity, that had been a quarry but was now filled in and covered with an AB8 grass and wildflower mix grown under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.



Further along the route was another old quarry but this one had been landscaped and turned into a nature reserve, with a central lake, reedbeds, small islands and surrounded by another AB8 area. Guided by their teachers, the pupils were able to identify birds, wildflowers and the occasional hare.

During their tour of the three quarries the children collected different rocks and stones to take back to the classroom. The entire trip incorporated elements of the KS2 science curriculum.

The vegetable treasure hunt at the end served two purposes: it highlighted some of the other crops grown on the farm, thus cementing the children's understanding of where some of their food came from; and it got them moving in a safe environment.

Over the course of a six-month period, the farm played host to five other year groups. Each year group had specific topics: maximising plant growth, where food comes from, selective breeding of livestock were all among the topics. Each topic related to an aspect of the National Curriculum.

The sessions followed the same format: a coach would transport the pupils to a meeting point on the farm. The farm manager and the course facilitator would meet the group and talk for 10 minutes about the farm, making the themes covered in the introduction relevant to the day's topic.

The group would then get a safety talk before setting off to explore parts of the farm. At various stages, the group facilitator would stop and point out things of interest and answer any questions.

At the end of the session, the group would return to the barn, eat a snack and replenish their thirst before a summary question and answer session that reinforced the learning.

The feedback from the school has been really positive. The headteacher, who has accompanied the groups for every visit, reported great recall and real signs of engagement from the majority of the pupils.

From the farm's point of view, under CSS, the agreement was three visits per year, which the farm received money for. That the farm has gone above and beyond is a bonus.

The scheme is working because several elements have fallen into place at the same time.

The farm owner was open to hosting the school

The headteacher of the school recognised the value of an off-site experience

The facilitator, who is part of the North Norfolk Coastal Group farm cluster, is a former teacher and so has experience of health and safety, lesson planning and running a children's activity.

The transport and the cost of the facilitator was met by the Lugden Hill Charity.

Brilliantly, the scheme is continuing next year with the same school coming back to Manor Farm and linking more farm activity to the curriculum. There are also plans to extend the scheme to another school/farm link in the area.

For farm manager, James Davidson, who has spoken at the start of each visit, this is a really important thing to be involved in for two main reasons: 'We are helping children make the connection between what they eat at home and what is grown on the farm, but more importantly, we are enthusing them about farming and that is the only way we will get bright young talent into the sector.'