



# Chadsgrove Educational Trust Specialist College

## Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

November 2024

The community, sensory, vegetable garden project was an initiative that is very close to our heart, it's a project that was wholly envisioned and steered by our students.

Back in October 2022, during Student Ambassador meetings, students voiced that they would like to see the garden area improved so they could enjoy the outdoors and learn new skills. Students combined this vision with a desire to help others in the local community. From this the vegetable garden project was born.

Students voiced particular aspects that would be key to the gardens success, they were:

- ⇒ **Accessibility** - students wanted a garden that would be accessible to all so everyone could enjoy and learn together.
- ⇒ **Sensory** - students wanted a range of sensory elements to explore that would provide stimulation through sight, smell, sound and touch.
- ⇒ **Learning** - students wanted more space whereby they could learn outdoors all year round.
- ⇒ And finally **Community** - Students wanted a garden that they could be proud of, a place where they can invite their peers, members of the community and Chadsgrove School students and host events in. They also wanted a space where they could grow produce to donate to community projects to help others.

18 months later, after a successful fundraising campaign and lots of hard work we have been able to bring the students vision to life and we could not be any prouder.



## Planning

Students were involved in the design and planning of the garden from the very beginning and stipulated that:

- ⇒ the raised planters were accessible for all students who use a range of wheelchairs or walking frames to access
- ⇒ the gate and paths were wide enough to accommodate students with walking frames and additional support alongside if required
- ⇒ the outdoor learning space facilitated easy access
- ⇒ the garden was eco-friendly, so the rain water from the gutters could be used to water the flowers in the planters



An illustrated plan of the garden was created by students (see above) and the vision was born!

# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## Fundraising Campaign

We budgeted to raise £11,332 and shared our flyer far and wide (see below).

After a fantastic fundraising campaign we raised an incredible £15,747!!



Funding received from	Amount
Crowdfund Worcestershire	£5,430
The Gosling Foundation	£7,000
Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council	£1,500
Other online donations	£3,317
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>£15,747</b>

As we exceeded our original target and raised additional valuable funds we were able to look at developing the whole garden to become a valuable learning resource for all of our students, our fellow Chadsgrove School pupils, our friends and families and members of the community.

Students asked for more of a sheltered space in which they could learn, something like a log cabin or summer house which would also act as a quiet place to go to engage their senses with the outdoors whilst being protected from the elements – this would effectively be the ‘gazebo’ that we had originally envisaged.

It was requested that the sheltered space have enough room for wheelchairs and walking aids to easily access and manoeuvre once inside, have a roof and have floor to ceiling windows to look out of.



## Bespoke Design

Ensuring the garden was accessible and fit for purpose was key to its success and the valuable benefits it would have for many students for years to come.

Students worked closely with staff and landscapers to meticulously design specific features that would promote inclusivity and opportunities for all ages and abilities.





# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The College Garden Before...

Our garden before was overgrown, with no suitable walkways, unstable decking and rotten planters.





# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The College Garden During...

We enlisted the help of the highly recommended Lambscapes Ltd to help bring our vision to life and to deliver our vision to very high standards.

We were also very lucky to have had the incredible support of our local community champion Kevin Hatch and the team from Severn Trent Water. Kevin arranged for the garden to be completely cleared for us (free of charge!) and Forest Garden helped us source and install the most perfect wooden learning space. Thank you all so much!



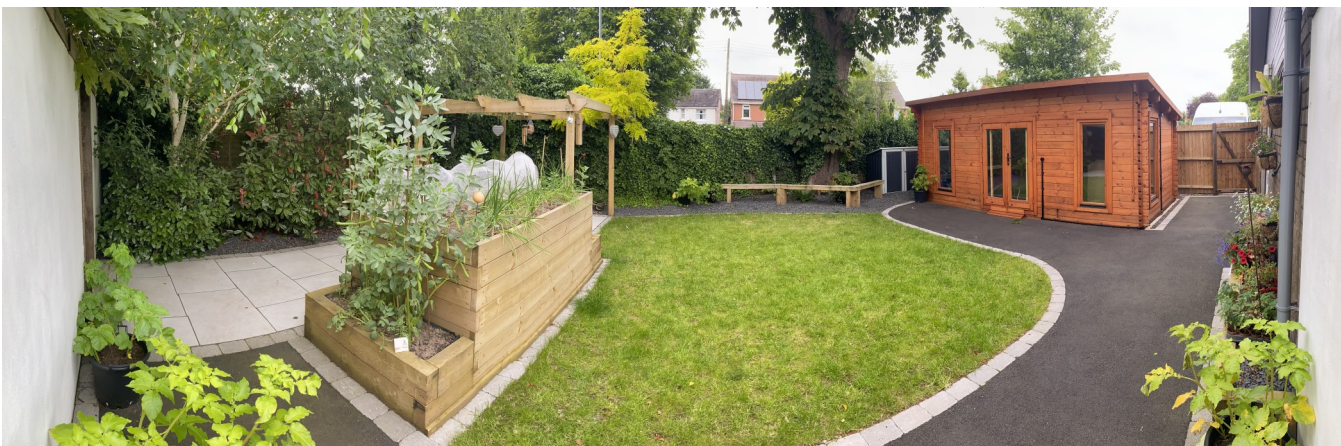
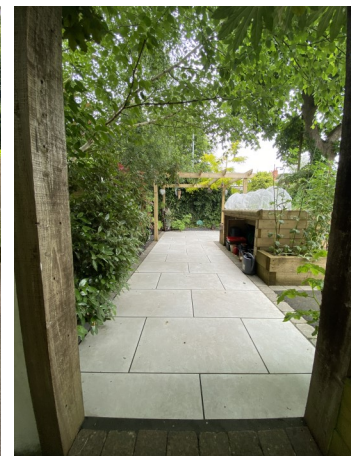
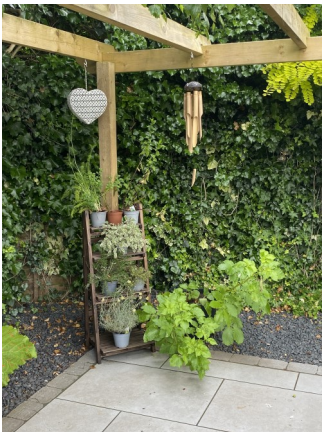


# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The College Garden After...

We are thrilled with our outstanding garden. From the students' vision to the final creation, the transformation has been phenomenal and we could not be more pleased with outcome.

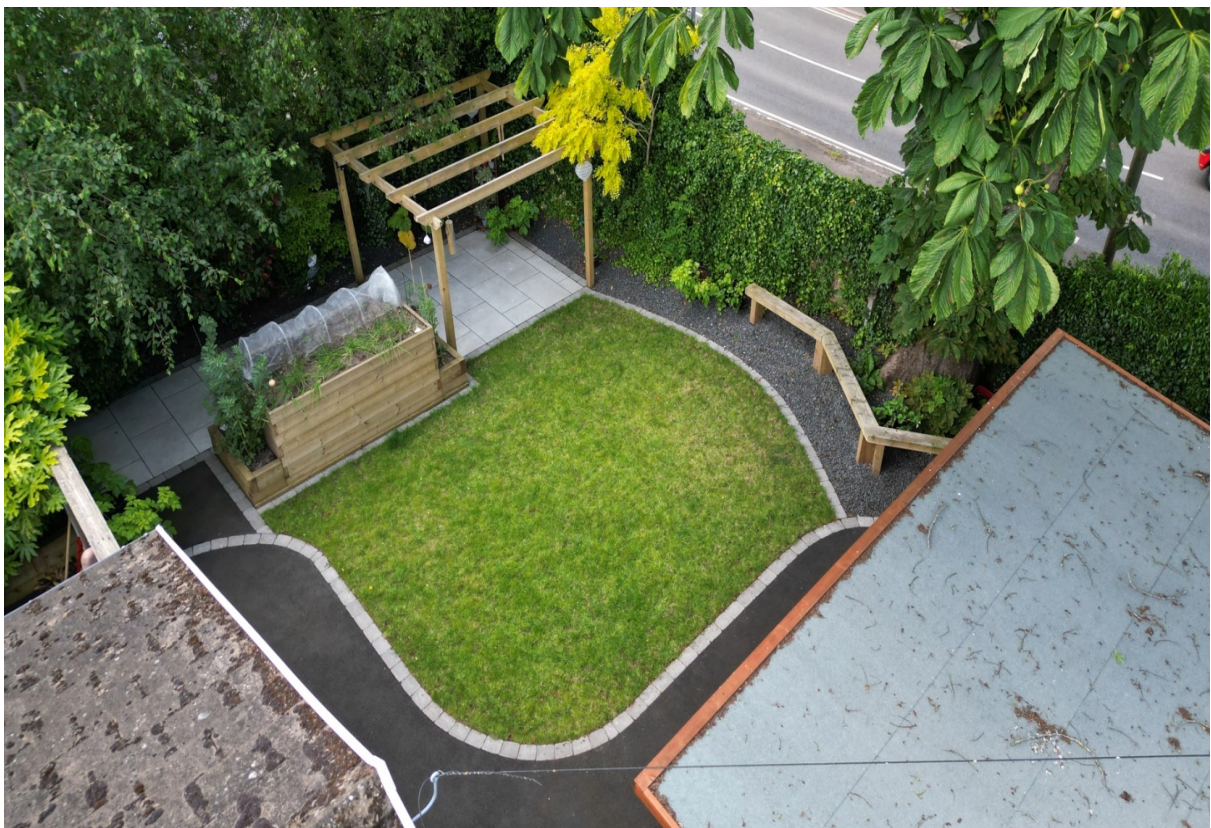
The garden area is calm, accessible, sensory, eco friendly, inclusive and provides us with an additional educational space that can be used all year round to enrich students learning and support mindfulness and wellbeing.





# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The Vision vs The Reality





# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The College Opening Party

On Wednesday 26th June we invited key individuals whom had worked hard to bring our vision to life, Community Champions, supporters, families and pupils from Chadsgrove School to join us at our official Garden Opening Party.

It was a well attended event and provided us with the perfect opportunity for us to say thank you for the incredible transformation and for the difference their support has made. Each supporter was awarded with a special certificate and a tomato plant which had been specially grown by students in their new garden.

The party also gave students an opportunity to put in to practice their independent living skills as they made fresh biscuits and scones which they proudly served to our guests.



A newspaper report of the Garden Opening Party can be read here:

<https://bromsgrovestandard.co.uk/news/community-garden-dreams-come-true-for-students-at-bromsgroves-chadsgrove-college/>

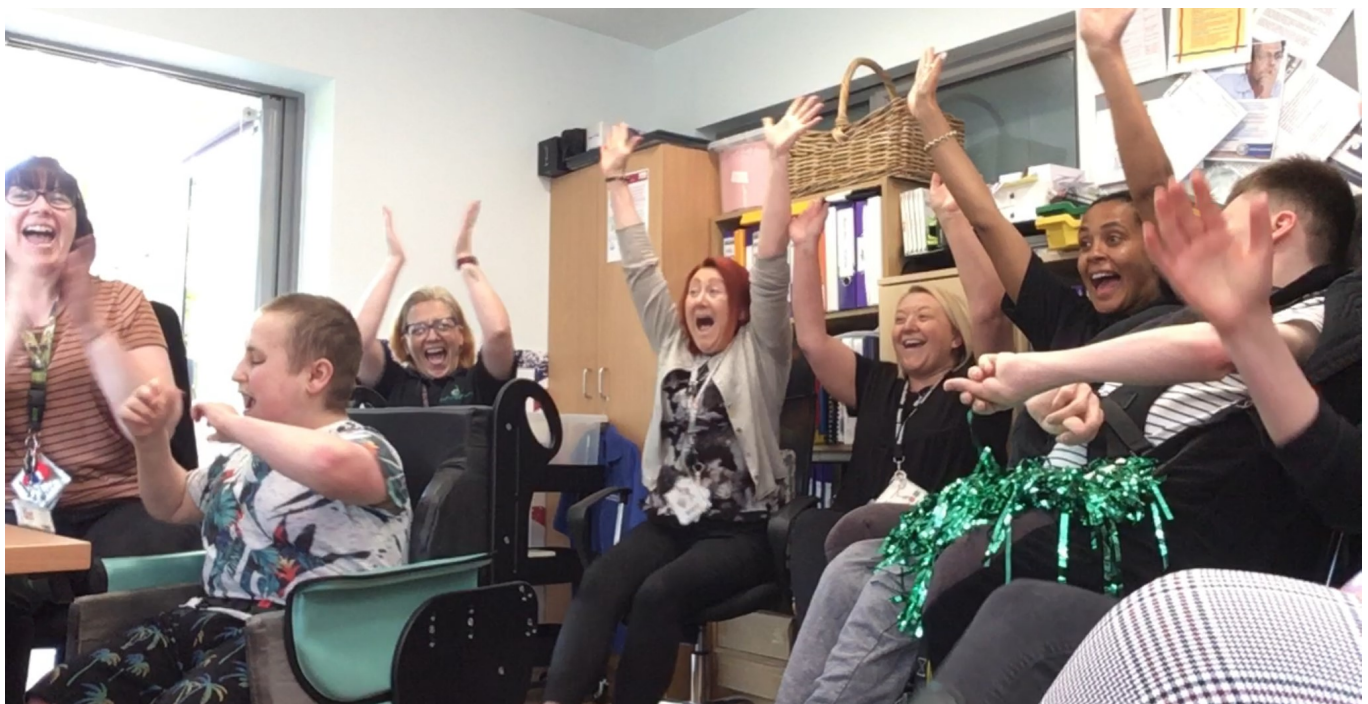


## Award Winning Garden

In recognition of the outstanding vision that students voiced and the outcomes achieved, in May 2023 we won the Natspec Innovation in Student Voice Award – an achievement that we are immensely proud of as it encapsulates all that we do to empower our students to be heard .



Natspec Award Newspaper Article: <https://bromsgrovestandard.co.uk/news/celebration-time-as-bromsgroves-chadsgrove-college-wins-prestigious-award/>



Above: Staff and students finding out that they had won the Natspec Innovation in Student Voice Award!



## The Impact

The garden has provided our students, staff and community with the most valuable learning and wellbeing resource and has been so beneficial to all that use it. The difference the garden has and will continue to be make to our students, staff and community is priceless. Just some of the key benefits we've reaped so far are below:

### Physical Benefits

- ⇒ **Improved Motor Skills:** Regular activities such as planting, watering, and harvesting have enhanced fine and gross motor skills in students. Tasks like digging with adapted tools and carrying watering cans have provided gentle physical exercise that is tailored to students' abilities.
- ⇒ **Increased Mobility:** The garden's design includes smooth, wide pathways that are wheelchair accessible, encouraging students to explore the space independently and with minimal assistance if required.
- ⇒ **Enhanced Physical Wellbeing:** Students have participated in many inclusive exercise and Yoga classes outside.



### Emotional and Psychological Benefits

- ⇒ **Stress Reduction:** Interaction with nature is known to reduce stress and anxiety. Many students have reported feeling calmer and more relaxed after spending time in the garden. The sensory elements, such as fragrant herbs and tactile plants, provide a calming and soothing environment.
- ⇒ **Enhanced Well-being:** The garden and outdoor learning space has served as a peaceful retreat from the classroom, offering a space where students can enjoy quiet time, re-regulate themselves or simply enjoy the beauty of nature. Staff and students have reported feeling much happier when out in our College garden.



Staff have also enjoyed many lunch breaks in the garden and have been able to utilise the space to complete meetings and lesson preparation in a naturally lit, quiet, calming space. Staff have also partaken in outdoor yoga sessions which have been well attended and helps boost morale.

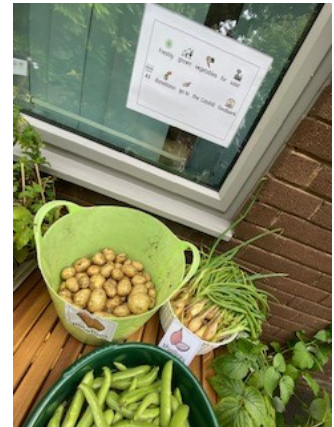
## The Impact Continued...

### Cognitive and Educational Benefits

- ⇒ **Hands-on Learning:** The garden is a living classroom where students have been able to engage in practical, hands-on learning experiences. Students have already started learning about plant biology, the life cycle of plants, and the importance of sustainability and nutrition.
- ⇒ **Sensory Stimulation:** The diverse sensory experiences in the garden stimulate cognitive functions. Students have enjoyed engaging multiple senses—sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste, all of which has helped to enhance their learning and memory retention.

### Social Benefits

- ⇒ **Collaboration and Teamwork:** Our garden activities often focus on teamwork and fostering collaboration amongst students. This has helped develop their social skills and has encouraged peer interaction. Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists have also used the outdoor space to deliver many 1:1 and group sessions.
- ⇒ **Community Building:** The garden has become a focal point for College community events, bringing together students, tutors, parents carers /advocates, pupils and staff from Chadsgrove School and external schools who visit us for transitional link projects.
- ⇒ We have been able to optimise the garden space to offer more fabulous stalls at our annual Summer Fete where key stakeholders and members of the community were able to join us. This sense of community enhances the students' feeling of belonging and inclusion.





# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The Impact in Numbers (to date)

### Produce Grown: 202

- 57 Broad Beans
- 44 Potatoes
- 32 shallots
- 29 tomato plants
- 12 strawberries
- 17 sunflower plants
- 11 aubergine plants



### Local businesses supported: 6

- Lambscapes Limited (Landscapers) – 9.8 miles
- Forest Garden Limited (Outdoor classroom) – 11 miles
- Bayliss Group Electricals (Outdoor electrics) - 11 miles
- Wildmoor Grabaway (skip hire) – 2.5 miles
- OCL Direct (materials) - 12 miles
- Central Sheds and Fencing (Fence and Gate) – 1 mile
- Willowbrook Garden Centre (Flowers and plants) – 0.3 miles



### Community Champions visited: 9

- Cllr. Sam Ammar - Chair of Council
- Cllr. Shirley Webb - Chair of Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- Cllr. Bernard McEldowney - Chair of Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council
- Kevin Ward - Bromsgrove Town Crier
- Karen May - Cabinet Member with Responsibilities for Communities



- Jo Slade - Bromsgrove Court Leet and Friends of St Johns Church
- Bradley Thomas MP - Bromsgrove MP
- Kevin Hatch - Severn Trent
- Jules Evans - Bromsgrove Royal British Legion and Completely Bromsgrove

# Community Sensory Vegetable Garden Report

## The Impact in Numbers (to date)

**College Students benefitted: 16**

**Hours of Learning: 150+**

**College staff benefitted: 19**

**External students visited: 38**

- 26 Chadsgrove School pupils
- 12 students from external schools/college link projects.

**Community help received: 4 volunteers (12 hours from Severn Trent Water)**

**Community Projects supported: 3**

- Catshill Foodbank - £55 donated through sales of vegetables and plants
- Cosy Café Catshill - donation of potatoes
- St Basils Café – aubergine donation



The sensory vegetable garden has significantly enhanced the lives of students with complex medical conditions and physical disabilities at Chadsgrove Specialist College.

By providing a space that combines therapeutic, educational, and social benefits, the garden has become a cornerstone of our College community.

The success of this project underscores the strength of community collaboration, the profound impact that such initiatives can have on the well-being and development of our students and the positive outcomes of empowering students voices to be heard.



## Thank You

On behalf of all Students, Staff and Directors we express our heartfelt thanks for the generous donations and support received to help us bring this project to life.

To those that donated towards our project, your contributions are more than just financial support; they are a testament to the compassion and dedication that bind our community together. Each pound donated, each seed planted, and each hour students spend out here is providing valuable opportunities to learn, grow, and experience the joys of nature.

Gardening is a therapeutic activity that offers numerous benefits for physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Physically, it helps improve motor skills, coordination, and strength, especially through tasks like planting, watering, and harvesting. For our students, these activities are crucial in promoting physical development and enhancing their abilities.

Emotionally, gardening fosters a sense of responsibility and accomplishment. The process of nurturing a plant from seed to harvest instils patience, perseverance, and pride. For our students, this can be incredibly empowering, providing a sense of purpose and boosting their self-esteem.

Mentally, gardening offers a form of mindfulness and stress relief. The act of connecting with nature, feeling the soil, and observing the growth of plants can be very calming. It helps reduce anxiety, improve focus, and promotes a positive outlook on life. For our students, who often face significant challenges, the garden is a sanctuary of peace and tranquillity.

Socially, the garden encourages teamwork and collaboration. It brings students together, allowing them to share responsibilities and work towards common goals.

*"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow"*

Audrey Hepburn

Thanks to the incredible support we have received, we are not only believing in tomorrow but actively shaping a brighter, more inclusive future for our students to grow.



## Thank You

The incredible support received has made it possible for us to purchase the necessary tools, seeds, and adaptive gardening equipment tailored to the unique needs of our students. More importantly, it has allowed us to create a safe and accessible environment where every student, regardless of their abilities, can participate and thrive.

The generosity we received has not only funded a garden but has sown seeds of hope and empowerment in the hearts of our students. The belief in our vision propels us forward and inspires us to reach even greater heights.



We also extend our thanks to everyone who has dedicated their time and energy to bring this project to life. The hard work and commitment shown ensures that our garden is an accessible and welcoming place for all.

We'd like to say a special thank you Ash and the wonderful team at Lambscapes who fully understood the assignment, embraced our vision, listened to and worked with our students and delivered the most amazing accessible garden.

A big thank you also goes to Kevin Hatch and the team from Severn Trent. Kevin helped develop the first stage of our outdoor area back in 2022, the generosity and kindness shown from Kevin and his team inspired our students to want to give back to the local community. For this project Kevin and his team at Severn Trent were instrumental in preparing the grounds ready for the garden transformation to take place. Without these foundations we would not have been able to have grown our garden in to the most amazing space that we have now.



Thank you

Thank you everyone for your kindness, generosity, and unwavering support. Together, we are making a difference, one plant at a time.