

# Take me to THE RIVER



The Scottish children who hatch brown trout in the classroom and then release them into the wild will forever feel closer to their local environment, reports  
**Katie Masters...**



eaten, trodden on or washed away. In the schools, there is a far higher chance of survival. If all the eggs were successfully hatched, that would mean an extra 20,000 trout slipping into the Clyde this year. But this project isn't about re-stocking the rivers...

"It's about putting working scientists in front of primary-aged children," says Dr Yeomans. "They find out about biology, fresh water, rivers, how important the Clyde is to the human population: amongst other things it provides drinking water and takes away waste. If we want to build social attitudes about caring for the environment it's best to start when children are at primary school, because they're not cynical – they're enthusiastic. So our three objectives for the project are to get young people interested in the river; to get them to take pride in their local environment and to get them to think about how they can improve the environment."

Feedback from the schools say that they are achieving all those goals and more. Jennifer Weir, a P5 teacher from Millersneuk Primary School in Lenzie, East Dunbartonshire, says that the children in her class who are looking after the trout have become so concerned about pollution in the Clyde that they are planning to write to the council and want to try and organise a big litter-clearing session. It's a feeling shared by the children from St Blane's Primary in South Lanarkshire.

"When we ran the project last year we all walked down to the river," explains Fiona Smyth, the acting deputy head. "I could hear the shock in the children's voices as they looked around and saw the litter. They were asking, 'Will our fish survive in there?' It had really given them a deeper understanding of their environment. They're putting something they care about into the water and they want it to live."



## Not just a science lesson

But for the teachers, environmental awareness is only one aspect of what Clyde in the Classroom delivers. It's also a springboard for high-quality work across the curriculum.

"There was a sense of wonder about everything to do with the trout," says Suzanne Kenney, the head of Castlehill Primary in Glasgow. "So all the work they were doing that was connected with it had a heightened sense of engagement. These fish were hatching and growing in their school, in front of their eyes. From the start, it was a perfect introduction to the life cycle. We had a parent who was a fishmonger and he came into the school to teach children how to fillet a fish and to give them the chance to taste smoked trout. Not all of them wanted to – but it obviously had a link to the life cycle and it also sparked discussions about why the environment that the fish live in has a direct relevance for us. And it led into work on the food chain."

"The children were learning things that I hadn't expected them to be inspired by," adds Mrs Kenney. "One of the scientists who came in to speak to the children mentioned the term 'eutrophication'. This is

when an abundance of nutrients gets into water (sometimes naturally, but often as the result of fertiliser runoff). This causes algae to grow and start to deplete the oxygen levels in the river – which then kills off other aquatic life. It's a sophisticated term, but it grabbed the children – to the extent that they went and spent their break times coming up with a rap about eutrophication!"

At Millersneuk, the children studied the engineering behind the hatchery: discussing why it was made of moulded plastic and why it had a lid. They also spent time looking at different materials and what would make them float or sink.

"The project feeds in very easily to the maths and geography curriculums too," says Miss Weir. "The children have to keep an eye on the temperature in the hatchery, so there's a real-life context for reading scales, plotting graphs and dealing with negative numbers. And we used maps to follow the course of the Clyde and to plot various points along it. That taught them about co-ordinates and how to use the key on an Ordnance Survey map."

But, she says, the trout also sparked some of the best writing she had seen from her class: whether the writing was

imaginative, personal or instructional. Fiona Smyth at St Blane's agreed.

"The excitement the children have about the trout heightens their creativity," she says. "I ran the project in another school I worked at and my P5 class there created an animation – Celebrity Fish Brother, featuring the likes of Mackerel Jackson and Leonardo di Fishy. They children were creating models of the characters, writing scripts, filming. It was amazing!"

And alongside all that creativity, Clyde in the Classroom also promotes a shared sense of purpose amongst the classes caring for the fish.

"What I have been most struck by is how the project has helped to develop children's personal and social skills," says Finlay Campbell, a Junior 4 teacher at St Columba's Independent School in Inverclyde. "The children work together collectively to care for the fish. They take fair turns. They make sure that the ice we use to keep the hatchery cool is being put in at the right time. They deal with what happens when an egg or a fish dies. They take ownership because if they don't care for the fish, the fish won't survive."

If you're not impressed by that, let minnow!

For more information on this project, visit [clydeinverfoundation.org](http://clydeinverfoundation.org) and [clydeintheclassroom.com](http://clydeintheclassroom.com)



## WIDENING THE NET

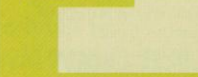
5 The number of schools that took part in the inaugural Clyde in the Classroom in 2000.



96 The number of schools taking part in Clyde in the Classroom in 2014.



64% The proportion of the 548 primary schools in Clyde river catchment that have been involved in the project since 2000.



18,965 The number of pupils who have passed through the project to date.