

Thinking global, acting local



Climate change is very concerning for anyone living in the 21st century and therefore it is essential to educate ourselves and others of its drastic effects if strict measures are not enforced. The Henrietta Barnett School has long advocated eco-friendly principles, whether through assemblies or fundraisers and the pupils are aware of environmental issues. Often, in subjects like Geography, we debate matters such as the relevance of COP26 and the impact of social media on keeping the environment a point of discussion. Although we are lucky to be surrounded by greenery in a beautiful place like the Suburb, we need to know what the world faces in terms of climate change effects and being educated is the first step to being able to take action against events like global warming.

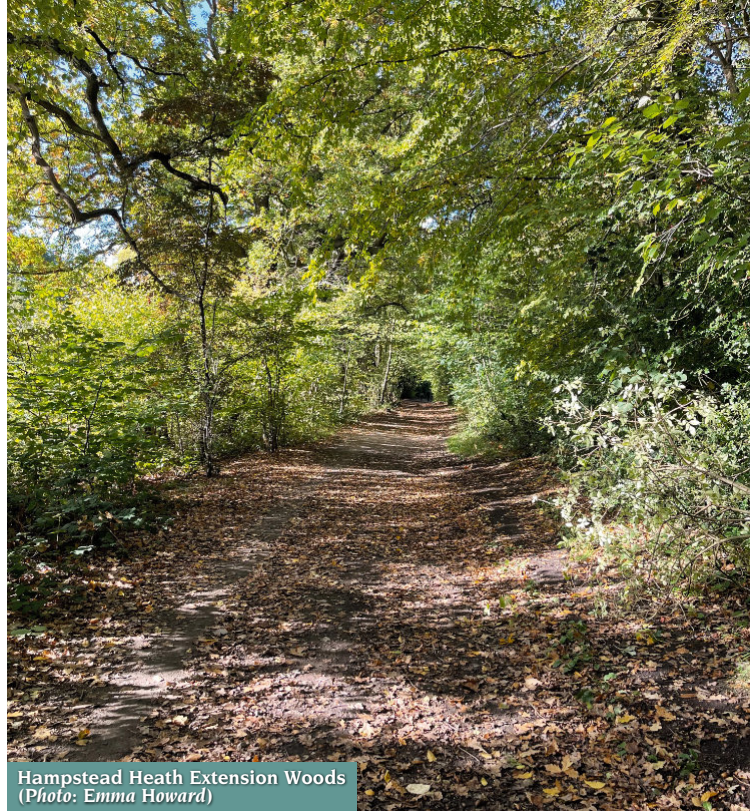
Among recent initiatives to preserve the environment, we held a large bake sale inviting every member of the school to participate. The money raised was used to buy a 7 acre plot of land in the rainforest. Thus, we were able to help preserve the land, prevent the destruction and burning of trees and the ecosystem which depend on them. The bake sale made people realise the positive impact we can have, and we would definitely urge people to donate money to organisations such as World Land Trust to protect rainforest land.

Similarly, our school's music department adopted their own animal, an endangered elephant. Protecting the animals is also a crucial step in protecting the environment and as a whole school we aim to continue to maintain biodiversity along with preserving the environment.

A more basic but vital step we should all take is being greener in our daily lives, for example, when packing lunch or buying items of food and drink. Our school canteen has been using biodegradable cutlery and packaging for a few years. This ensures that when the waste is disposed of it will not be damaging to the environment and will safely be decomposed by microorganisms. Pupils are also encouraged to use their own lunch boxes when buying canteen food, with a reduction on the price of the meal as an incentive. People are also encouraged to use the metal cutlery provided in the canteen, which can be returned and reused, reducing the need even for recycling.

HBS has been taking positive steps towards protecting the environment in many different ways from educating pupils about the impacts of their actions to utilising more eco-friendly equipment as well as raising money for the cause. These are only some of the things that the school does but they are crucial to create a better environment. Climate change is a very serious threat and it is important that people learn about it from a young age so they can take the right steps be well informed about this imminent issue.

BY SAANVI AKULA AND RIYA SHAH, HENRIETTA BARNETT SCHOOL



Hampstead Heath Extension Woods
(Photo: Emma Howard)

Environment and well-being

Many of us have a profound appreciation for the environment and the natural world around us. Perhaps this has become more striking over the last few years particularly, during the Covid-19 lockdown when each of us was permitted just one stroll in the open air per day.

This renewed appreciation, alongside the climate crisis, has placed more focus on the benefits of being around nature. A 2019 study from the University of Exeter involving 20,000 people, showed that participants who spent two hours in green spaces – local parks or natural environments – were substantially more likely to report good health as well as psychological well-being. Furthermore, current emerging research has suggested that as well as improving short-term memory and reducing stress and anger, being amongst nature increases feelings of kindness and generosity. In a 2019 nationwide study, children growing up in lower levels of green space in urban areas had up to a 55% higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder independent from the effects of other known risk factors. Being outside and experiencing these environments is the most effective way to feel the impacts of being closer to nature, but it has recently been suggested that even watching nature documentaries is good for our mental health.

Although this can now be quantified with scientific evidence, throughout history a love of nature has been apparent in many societies and civilisations. An example of this is the romantic movement. It involved a rejection of previous artistic obsession with order and method and focused more on unified and individual human experience, drawing inspiration from nature and the parallels it had with emotion and interweaving creativity and spontaneity. The movement began around 1780, just 20 years after the beginning of the industrial revolution, which saw a mass migration to urban areas in search of jobs in manufacturing. Steam engines, smog and coal were everywhere, and pollution was noticeable in the water and the air. Romanticism could be seen as a return to nature, or rather a rejection of the intimidating and bleak modernisation of industry and machine. Nature was not only the subject of paintings, nor simply an influence on writers – it became a means of metaphorical expression in itself. Romantic poets saw in the earth, its cycles, structures, deformities, and stark natural contrasts, the suffering or pain that they felt and united the two. This pain was partially inflicted by the unnatural factories which sprung up all around them, evoking fear in poets that the sincerity of life would be choked away, and their peace infringed on.

The housing crisis plaguing us at the moment, which has led to the building of homes on any land available, may be a parallel to the choking which the romantics felt. And so, we should make the effort to utilise the many green spaces in our local area: Hampstead Heath, Lyttleton Playing Fields, East Finchley Cemetery, Coldfall Wood, and the Hampstead Heath Extension. Personally, during the pandemic, I loved discovering the East End Road Cemetery and taking walks through Coldfall Wood – I am sure that each of us has different special places which we enjoy going to the most. Wherever this place is, we are extremely privileged to have so many green areas within such close proximity and would be foolish not to venture to find the solace in our parks and ancient woods which fascinated the romantics, and which can bring us calm in an angry, confused and erratic modern world.

OSCAR GRAHAM, ARCHER ACADEMY

An appalling COP out

Recently, a series of critical reports were published by the UN. Their message is clear: human driven climate change is likely to cause irreparable harm to the planet, with little hope of preventing it. Based on current trends of emission reduction, we are likely to increase global temperatures by 2.5 degrees Celsius. This is of grave concern, as the scientific community almost all agree that we need to keep to an increase of 1.5 degrees or reach a point of no return: unprecedented destruction to both the biosphere and human society.

More must be done. In a little over seven years, humanity must reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by half, no easy feat when the UN environment agency stated that there is “no credible pathway” to reaching net zero emissions. All this during a time where despite record profits, many oil companies pay little tax. There is an establishment of climate injustice both here and around the world, where if you are poorer, you are having a smaller environmental impact, but suffering most of the consequences for the actions of the rich. Surely, it is the moral responsibility of each and every one of us to combat global warming.

Most of the promises made in last year's COP 26 in Glasgow have already been broken. If we are to have any hope of surviving as a species, it is imperative that COP 27 engenders a keen sense of urgency. Britain was reluctant to prioritise COP 27 citing “pressing domestic issues”, yet the cost of living crisis is only exacerbated by our country's unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels, whilst extreme weather events such as super-storms and floods are all too likely to take lives over the coming winter.

Clearly, individual actions, while beneficial (not least for our local green spaces such as Big Wood and Hampstead Heath), will not be enough to avert complete climate catastrophe. It is imperative that we lobby our leaders to actively keep this crisis in the forefront of their minds and their policies. In the words of Greta Thunberg, “Act as if your house is on fire, because it is.”

The world is on fire. Will you step up and make a change?

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