

## Education

One of the approved purposes of the HEAL project was to engage with 20 local schools/communities. The areas chosen to be a priority to work in were based on data from National Health datasets regarding factors affecting mental and physical health, including excess weight in children, inactivity in schools, and less than average accessible green/blue spaces. This highlighted areas of Burnley, Hyndburn, Lancaster, Pendle, Preston, South Ribble, Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool as the most likely to benefit from outdoor learning through the HEAL project.

A whole new education programme, Water + Wellness, was developed using HEAL funding and offered to primary schools in the areas highlighted above. Seven schools in total took part in the programme, five in Blackburn and two in Nelson, engaging around 300 pupils. Water + Wellness consisted of six sessions across the year, with one session per half term per school taking part:

### *Health walk with litter pick*

Pupils used OS maps to investigate the area local to their school, identifying green and blue spaces in walking distance. They then took part in a pre-planned walk and litter pick from school, cleaning up their local area.



### Tree planting

Pupils at the two Nelson schools were close Hard Platts, a site we were planting a HEAL-funded woodland on, and were able to walk from school to spend half a day tree planting. Pupils learnt all about what trees need to survive and why trees are amazing for our rivers. Schools in Blackburn had no tree planting sites nearby but were able to plant trees on their school grounds as part of the Pennine Lancashire Treescapes (PLanT) project running at the same time.



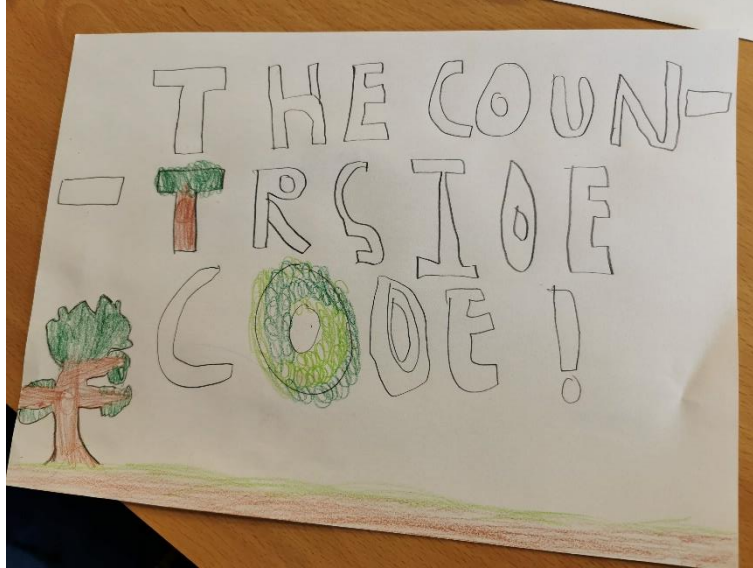
### Natural crafts and mindfulness

Pupils learnt ways of using nature to create art by way of natural tie-dyeing, making leaf prints and creating woodland braids. They created some lovely displays for the classroom before practicing mindfulness in nature through thinking about what they are thankful to nature for and taking part in river meditation.



## Water safety and Countryside Code

In the last session before the summer holiday, we worked with pupils to teach them essential water safety skills and how to protect the environment while enjoying green and blue spaces.



## Invertebrate identification

Pupils learnt the differences between vertebrates and invertebrates then used dichotomous keys to identify freshwater invertebrates from photos, developing scientific observation skills. They finished the session by making bug hotels to keep our minibeast friends warm and dry through the winter.



### Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow

Pupils learnt about different tree species, methods of tree dispersal and the life cycle of trees and plants. Each child was then able to plant their own acorn to grow into an oak tree, which may one day be planted into one of our future woodlands.



Due to the success of the Water + Wellness programme, we condensed it into a three half-day session programme which can run in the summer term. The activities included in this version will be the health walk and litter pick, water safety and Countryside Code, and seeds and cycles.

*"The children's learning was much more meaningful through the enrichment of your programme as it tied in with everything we learn" – Year 4 teacher, Nelson*

*"We would love to repeat what you did last year" – Head teacher, Blackburn*

*"Thank you for all the fantastic activities that you have done with my class this year. They have thoroughly enjoyed them and I know they will continue to enjoy them next year" – Year 3 teacher, Nelson*

*"Nature makes me feel calm" – Year 3 pupil*

*"I can't believe we are planting real trees! I don't want this day to ever end!" – Year 3 pupil*

As well as the Water + Wellness programme, we offered our usual Rivers in the Classroom activities to schools in HEAL priority areas, either fully- or partially-funded by the project. Nine schools took part in Rivers in the Classroom with help from HEAL funding, enjoying activities such as river walks, using our interactive river table, pulling up Himalayan Balsam and investigating invertebrates. These schools were in Preston, Blackburn, Great Harwood and Darwen and we engaged with around 320 pupils.

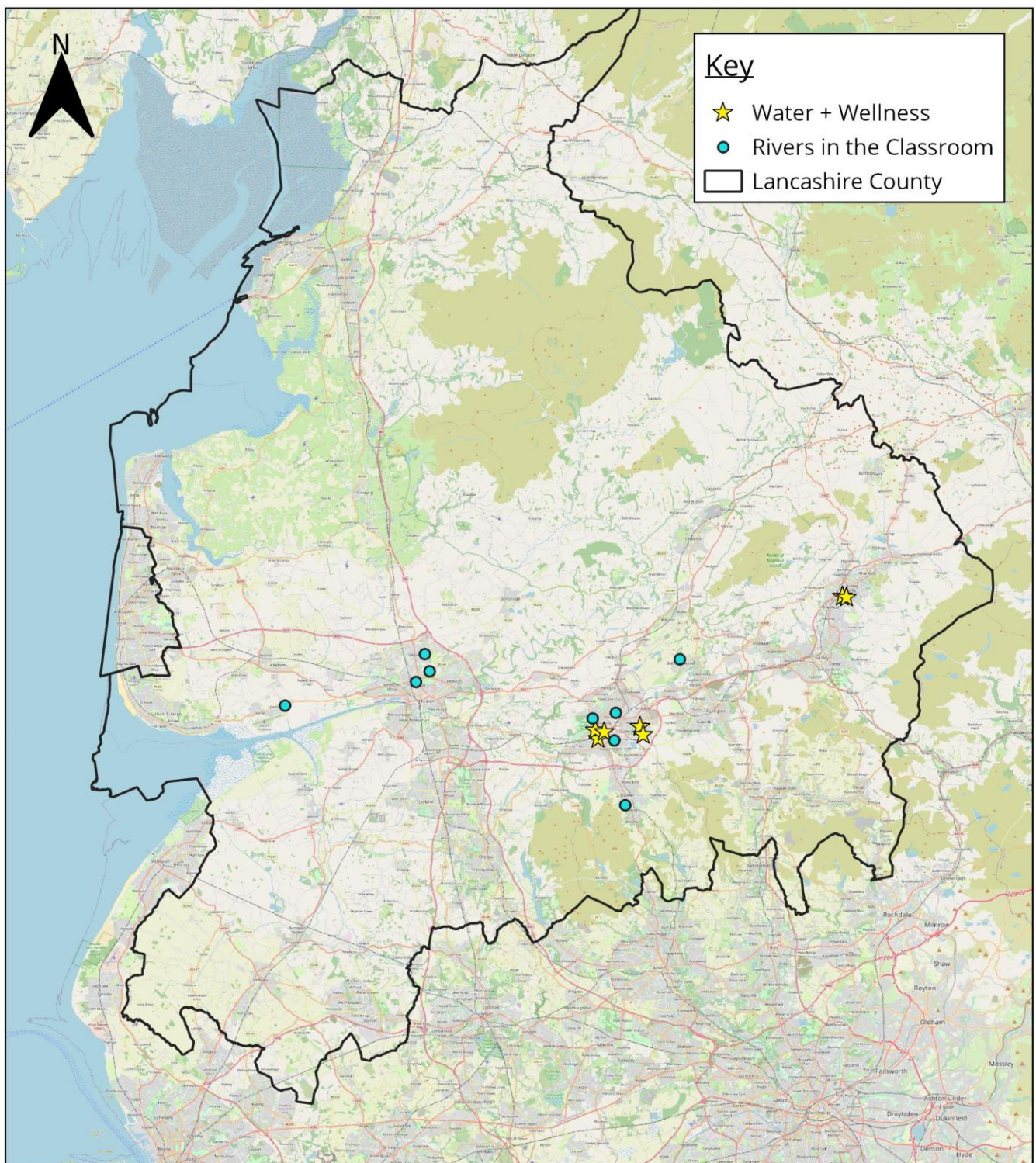
*“The children thoroughly enjoyed all the activities over the day and I feel they complemented each other well. The entire day was well organised and the content has supported our geography work on rivers very well” – Year 4 teacher, Preston*

*“We enjoyed all aspects of the trip. The children were fascinated to see the creatures that live in the river. The river table was an excellent tool to demonstrate how a river changes the landscape” – Year 4 teacher, Preston*



Photos above show a pupil reacting to seeing a cased caddisfly larva for the first time during a freshwater micro safari. She was “amazed at how it can build its own case like that”.

# Schools worked with as part of the Health and Environmental Action Lancashire (HEAL) Project



Author: Christi Lloyd

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Scale: 1 : 400000



## Child Wellness Surveys

Before the first Water + Wellness session and again after the last one, each child was asked to complete the Good Childhood Index questionnaire, an index of subjective wellbeing for children aged eight and over developed by The Children's Society. The idea behind this was to get some quantitative data regarding wellbeing and any changes in wellbeing between starting and finishing the Water + Wellness programme. We also added an element which assessed the child's feeling of connectedness to nature, as this is an important consideration when using nature to improve wellbeing; if an individual has no connection to nature, being in nature is unlikely to make them happier.

There was no significant change in subjective wellbeing of the children or how connected they felt to nature between the first and last Water + Wellness session. However, this does not mean that their wellbeing was not improved by taking part. The qualitative data collected through quotes and changes in behaviour suggest that the pupils did develop green thinking and became more aware of what they can do to protect nature. Children in urban areas wanting to plant more trees and do more litter picking and go to their local park more are surely children who feel like they have a greater connection to nature?

There are several reasons why these surveys were not the most efficient way of collecting data about the effectiveness of the Water + Wellness programme. First, although these sessions were not a one-off and continued throughout the year, there were often big gaps between activities – we know that repeated, regular contact with nature can have a positive effect on wellbeing, but these sessions were probably not regular enough to have that impact. Secondly, there will be many other factors that contribute to a child's wellbeing over the year, both in school and out of school. We were in school for two hours once every half term so it is unlikely that we would have had much, if any, of an impact on the children's wellbeing and feelings about nature with everything else that they are experiencing. Yes, they may want to check on the trees they have planted and have a better idea of how to look after the countryside when out and about, but 7-8 year olds' brains are busy developing and learning about the world around them. They might not be conscious of the subjects of the questions in the survey, such as "how happy are you with your life as a whole?". Further, the survey is intended for children aged eight and upwards but the children taking part in Water + Wellness were aged 7-8 when they first took the survey, and aged 8-9 the second time they completed it.

### Case Study: St Antony's RC Primary School, Blackburn

One school that took part in Water + Wellness was St Antony's Roman Catholic Primary School, located in the Shadsworth area of Blackburn. According to National Health datasets, Shadsworth has very high levels of obesity/inactivity-related illnesses and falls among the most deprived areas of England (top 10%). We found that children in this school were not given much opportunity to discover and explore their local green and blue spaces so, after we had been for the health walk and litter pick, we gave each child a copy of the map of their local area with our walk route included, to encourage them to go for walks with their family and friends. Some of the children told us in following sessions that they had been to the local park or for walks with family members, which was a huge positive change.

We planted trees with the pupils on their school grounds, which was a very enriching experience for them. We hope this instills a respect for nature in them so that, as they grow up, they want to care for their local area. On top of this, during our litter pick, pupils noted how much rubbish there was in their locality – hopefully this realisation, combined with a new-found sense of responsibility for nature, will create eco-conscious individuals.

Getting the children outside for some nature crafts and mindfulness was a huge success at this school in particular, as they have a lovely woodland space which can be used for outdoor learning. The children were the calmest I'd seen them while sitting on logs in the woods, eyes closed, listening to a river meditation story. These pupils also immersed themselves in the Countryside Code activities and produced some excellent posters describing how to look after the countryside.

As a result of discovering Ribble Rivers Trust through the Water + Wellness programme, St Antony's also went on to take part in our Trout in the Classroom project in 2022 and 2023. We have formed a great relationship with this school thanks to the HEAL project and hope we can continue working with them in the years to come.

