

EDUCATION

New school pigeon loft lets students spread their wings

Keeping feathered friends boosting pupils maths, say teachers

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SCHOOLCHILDREN have pulled off a real coo as they follow in the steps of the Queen by setting up a pigeon loft.

Pupils at Longshaw Junior School have secured a grant of £1,600 by the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (RPRA) to build an 18ft by 18ft loft and corridor to house the school's very own pigeons.

Pigeon fancying features in the Park Lee Road school's curriculum and has captured the imagination of many of the pupils.

Jonathan Berry, deputy head teacher, said: "There is something about pigeon racing which allows us to bring out the best in the pupils.

"And there is nothing more rewarding for a teacher than the children having fun during their learning.

"I didn't think for one minute that we would get the grant so it is just incredible, and it means we can take the project to the next stage.

"Hopefully we will now win some races."

The receipt of this grant follows an incident last year when a cat squeezed into the school's pigeon trap and killed all of the birds.

Having just joined Oswaldtwistle Homing Society, this incident came as a devastating blow to the school.

After hearing about the pupils' plight, a company called Belgica, based in the south, arranged for new birds to be donated to the school and a trip to the Royal Loft at Sandringham was also arranged.

But this recent gift will facilitate the installation of a new pigeon loft and corridor, which is supplied by Derbyshire firm Park Hall Timber Products.

The RPRA has also provided the school with a system to record the arrival of the birds as they return from races.

A Unikon Electronic Timing System will be adopted as the new method for the youngsters to time their birds.

The pigeons each have an electronic ring on their leg which scans them in when they return to the loft, and automatically sends a text to the pupils.

The school has also been entered into a One Loft Race and if their young pigeon finished first in the last race, the prize money totals £20,000.

Mr Berry said: "We started the project last year and very quickly we could see the benefits of it.

"It involves maths and sport and being out in the fresh air, which is sometimes what the children need most.

"It encourages teamwork and competitiveness too.

"The thought is to share this with other schools in the area because it is something that is very unique."

The regional president of the RPRA will deliver a cheque to the school on Thursday next week.



SOARING: Longshaw Junior School pupils are to get a pigeon loft