



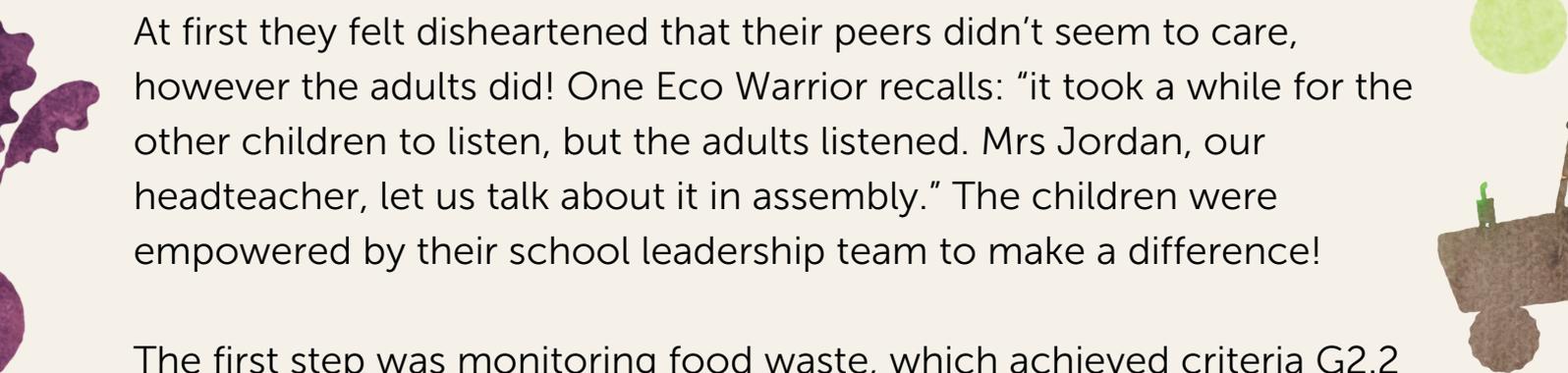
INSPIRING ECO WARRIORS



The Eco Warriors at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, located in the heart of Loughborough's diverse city centre, have been empowered by school leadership to inspire their peers, improve school lunches, and reduce waste.



A group of pupils with a passion for change noticed a lot of food and packaging waste. The Eco Warriors, as they later named themselves, could see there was a better way. They explained: "We looked on the floor and we saw it wasn't good, it was wasteful. The dinner ladies make good, nutritious food and it shouldn't be wasted."



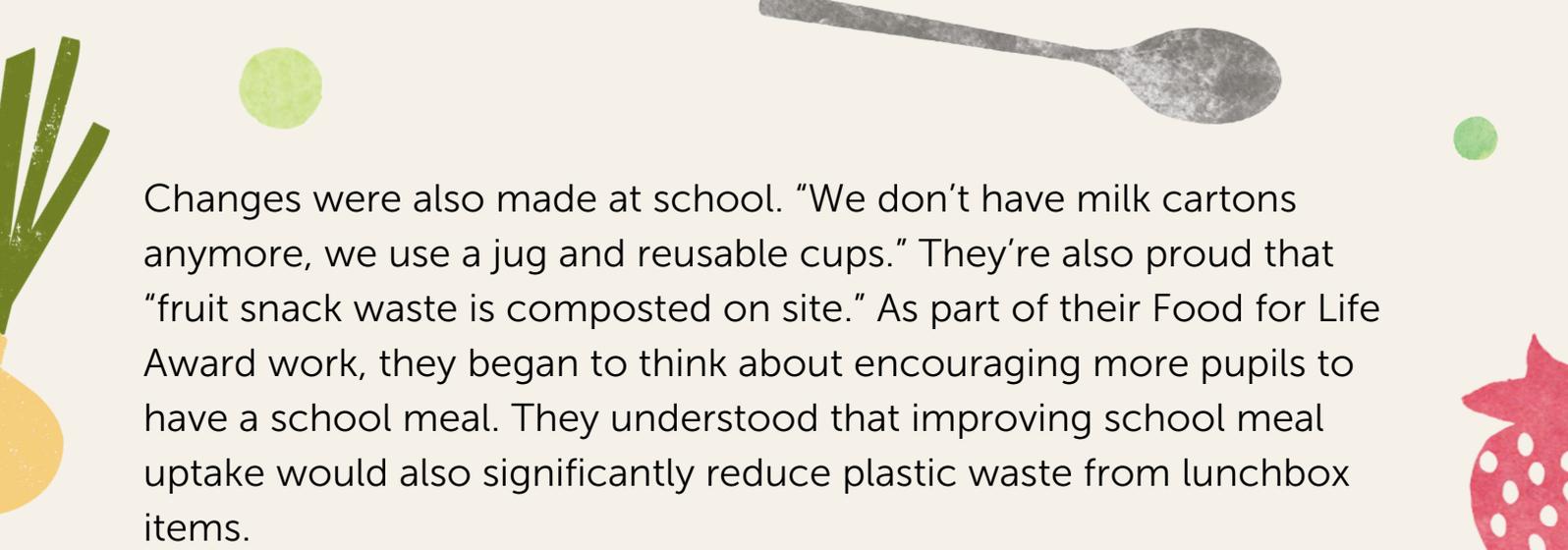
At first they felt disheartened that their peers didn't seem to care, however the adults did! One Eco Warrior recalls: "it took a while for the other children to listen, but the adults listened. Mrs Jordan, our headteacher, let us talk about it in assembly." The children were empowered by their school leadership team to make a difference!



The first step was monitoring food waste, which achieved criteria G2.2 towards their Food for Life Gold Award. Controversially, they began taking daily photos of the bin to be displayed in the dining hall. This wasn't well received initially, but it effectively demonstrated the scale of the problem: "People were saying, urgh, yuck, why are you showing us photos of that! We said it is disgusting but it is OUR waste, we need to do something about it!"



Each week the Eco Warriors presented their findings in assembly, and they also wrote a letter, signed-off by Deputy Headteacher Jo Rutledge, to all parents. They explain: "We encouraged everyone to have school dinners, but we also wanted to tell the parents about lunchbox contents and for everyone to bring in their own water bottle instead of single use bottles and cartons – now everyone brings reusable water bottles."



Changes were also made at school. "We don't have milk cartons anymore, we use a jug and reusable cups." They're also proud that "fruit snack waste is composted on site." As part of their Food for Life Award work, they began to think about encouraging more pupils to have a school meal. They understood that improving school meal uptake would also significantly reduce plastic waste from lunchbox items.

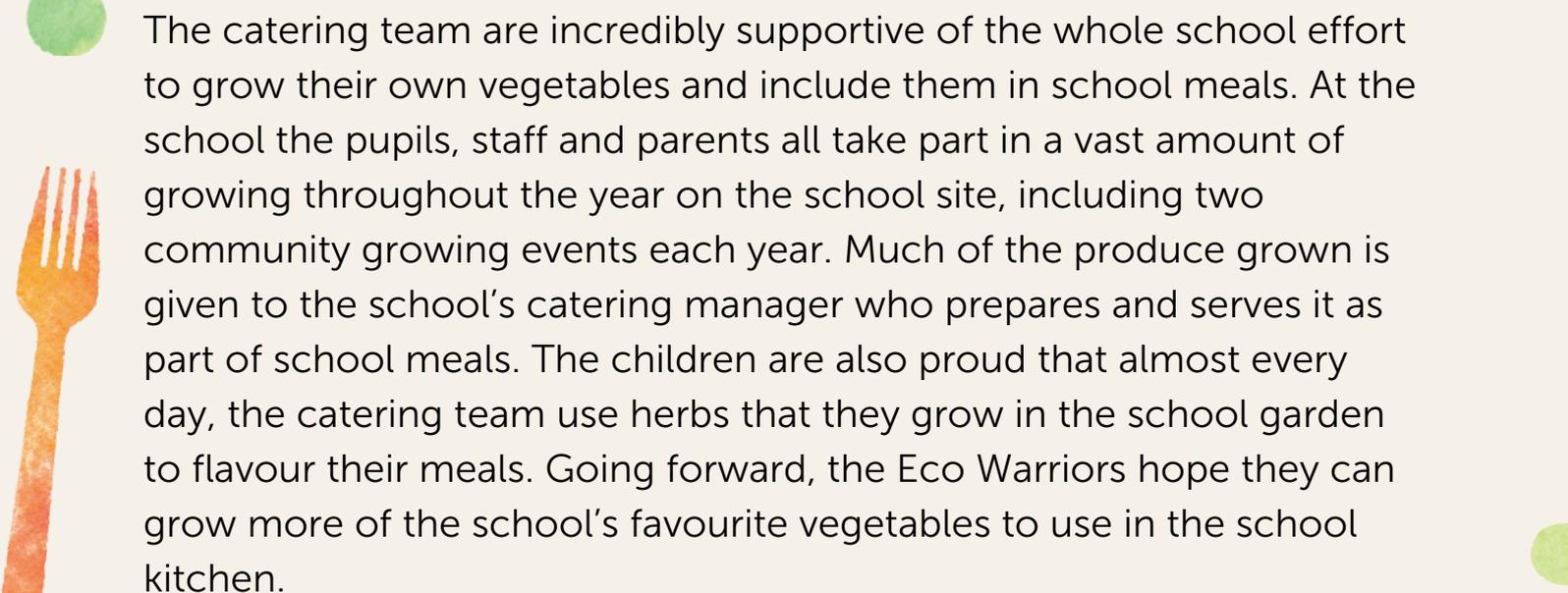
"We decided to do a survey about everyone's favourite vegetable, and we will repeat this every term as the seasons change. This time the result was cucumber, so we asked the kitchen team to serve cucumber every day." This simple switch has had multiple benefits: children feel listened to, more children are making a healthy choice as part of their school meal, and less food is being wasted.

**"Things have changed,
and people have wanted
to step-in. If the adults
hadn't listened, nothing
would have happened"**

- THE ECO WARRIORS



The catering team are incredibly supportive of the whole school effort to grow their own vegetables and include them in school meals. At the school the pupils, staff and parents all take part in a vast amount of growing throughout the year on the school site, including two community growing events each year. Much of the produce grown is given to the school's catering manager who prepares and serves it as part of school meals. The children are also proud that almost every day, the catering team use herbs that they grow in the school garden to flavour their meals. Going forward, the Eco Warriors hope they can grow more of the school's favourite vegetables to use in the school kitchen.



In addition, the Eco Warriors spend much of their lunchtimes checking the food waste on the dining hall floor and giving out positive stickers for those who have eaten all their vegetables. They continue to monitor the school bins but are incredibly proud to now have replaced their huge bin with a much smaller one with compartments to sort compostable waste.

“We want to inspire other schools because this is not just for us but for our school, the community ... everyone”

- THE ECO WARRIORS

Clearly, the Eco Warriors they have been empowered by headteacher, Mrs Jordan and other adults at St Mary's Catholic School to make a huge difference in a short time. Mrs Jordan says; "It is a privilege to listen to the Eco Warriors. Their action has created a change of mindset in school and a collective action from staff and children to reduce waste, as well as helping the school to achieve the Eco Flag and Silver Food for Life award. They are an inspiration and I feel so gladdened that; we have such passionate young people at St Mary's. The future of the planet is in good hands."

