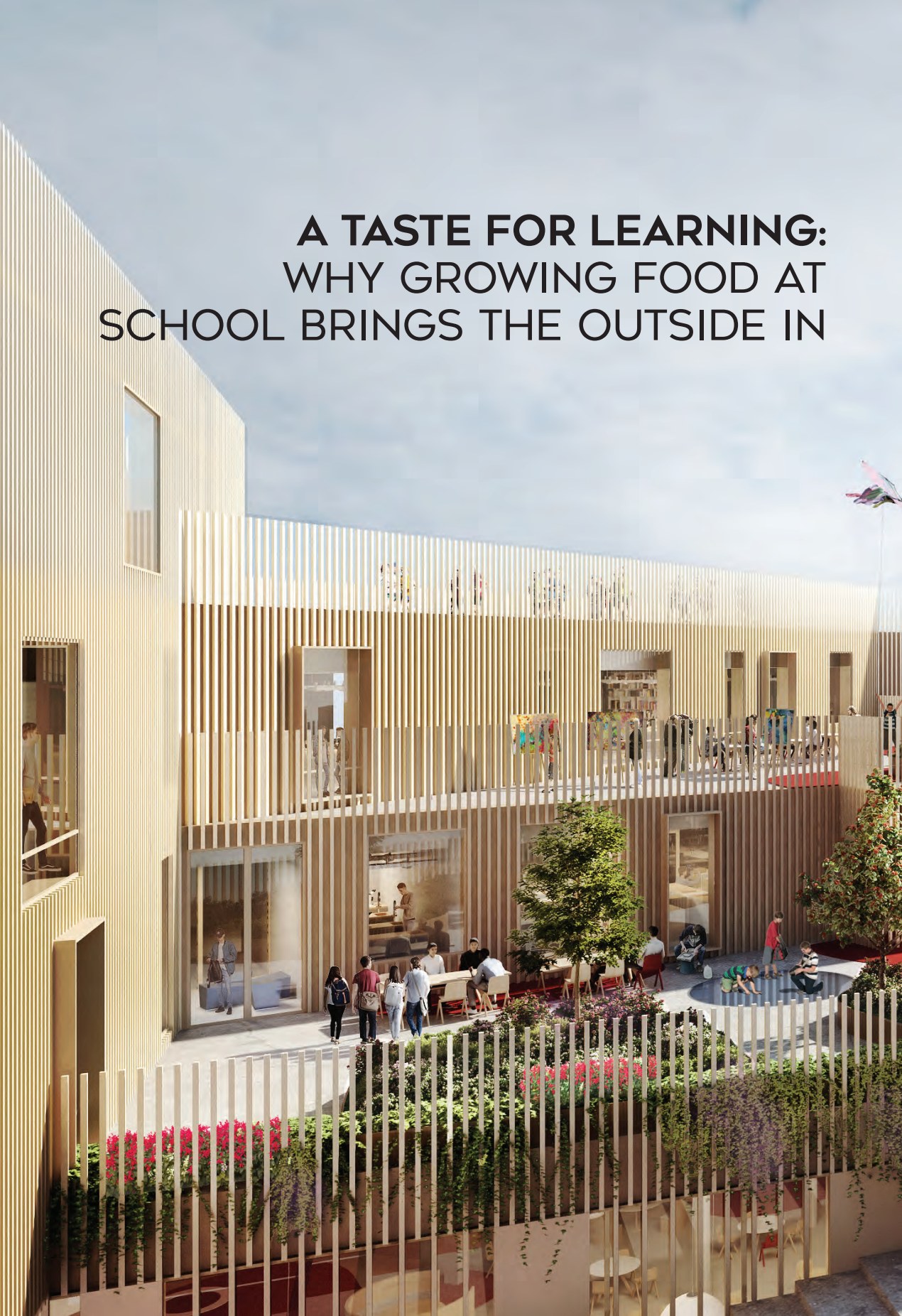
A TASTE FOR LEARNING: WHY GROWING FOOD AT SCHOOL BRINGS THE OUTSIDE IN



Studies show that pupils who engage in learning experiences outside of the classroom demonstrate higher levels of engagement in their learning, improve all round attainment, are more active and develop important life-long learning skills. Terry White, the chair of A4LE Europe, rounds up some examples of schools successfully adopting this approach.

THE PUPILS LEARN TO FOLLOW A RECIPE, GRATE, PEEL, WASH, CHOP, AND COOK MAKING DISHES LIKE SUMMER PUDDING, APPLE AND BERRY CRUMBLE, SOUP, PIZZA AND EVEN MINT TEA.

When designing primary schools, it is accepted best practice that there needs to be easy access to external learning environments. Even in schools with more than one storey, the design of learning platforms and roof terraces are becoming accepted features of contemporary school design.

Schools that value the importance of the external learning environment are also more likely to develop a student-centred and enquiry-led approach to learning.

These schools are enhancing the curriculum experience by taking learning outside in exciting and innovative ways, and bringing the experience of outside learning indoors, as a practical way to explore subject areas and making the curriculum more relevant.

At Damers First School in Dorset, UK, all the pupils garden as part of their curriculum. It is central to the ethos of the school that their learners connect with nature for the benefit of their health and for environmental education. The pupils work with volunteers under the leadership of Year One teacher, Edd Moore, in the school garden. They grow their own seeds in a “plastic bottle” greenhouse, learning the importance of growing vegetables and fruit through the seasons, plant seedlings out and harvest what they have grown. They use the produce to cook meals in their food technology room. The pupils learn to follow a recipe, grate, peel, wash, chop, and cook making dishes like summer pudding, apple and berry crumble, soup, pizza and even mint tea. They put into practice what they have learnt in maths to weigh out ingredients.

The concept of “ground to the table” is growing as an important approach within the school curriculum.

KATRINEDALS SCHOOL

At Charlton Manor Primary School in London, UK, the idea of "ground to table" has been developed further with a training kitchen for the primary age range. The school has a unique approach in that cookery is used creatively to deliver skills from the national curriculum. The children use induction hobs and ovens, which are specially adapted to ensure their safety. The kitchen is used for a wide range of lessons incorporating the skills in all curricular subjects. The kitchen was opened in 2013 by the world-renowned chef, Raymond Blanc. The current Teaching Chef, Joe Grollman, consults with class teachers to develop resources for topics that he can then deliver through the teaching kitchen.

Schools that recognise the importance of the relationship between pedagogy and space, understand that this applies to both external and internal learning environments. The school, its site and community become a learning campus. This approach liberates learning and enables the full range of creative activities, critical for a pupil's development, to take place.

The design of specialist and adaptable studio spaces to help integrate these approaches into the mainstream curriculum are important.

In Katrinedals School, Copenhagen, studio spaces have been designed to promote active learning through approaches to food technology as part of a wider "skills for life" approach. The food technology studio spaces are directly adjacent to main school circulation areas to allow open, visual, shared and more collaborative eating experiences.

In the City of Copenhagen this approach is being more fully developed at New Islands Brygge School. This school has a special emphasis on growing, making and preparing meals, with lunchtime a central feature of the school day. It places emphasis on the social aspects of food production and through the connectivity of inside / outside learning lends a more informed meaning to the external environment. This is fully reflected in the design of this school which creates adjacent outdoor areas that are part of an integrated campus. It is innovative, creative and engaging and values the importance of understanding a healthy lifestyle and respect for the environment.