In February 2102 I was invited, along with other teachers, to Total offices to hear about Total Green School Awards. While listening to people like YPTE’s Director, Peter Littlewood who are obviously passionate about the environment, I felt inspired but sat there thinking what could my class do? I left determined to give it a go, but hadn’t a clue where to start. I needn’t have worried. I went back to school next day and asked my P3 class what they could do to improve their immediate environment. They got thinking, had lots of ideas and decided to raise money to replace the mud in our playground with grass.

 The children took responsibility for keeping a record of what they were doing in a scrapbook in their own messy writing, they glued the pages together. However, they were very enthusiastic, worked hard and sent off their entry. One of criteria in the competition is presentation, so I wasn’t very confident. Luckily the judges must have liked the content, and the class were over the moon to be announced Regional Winners in the Totally Active category.

Last year I had a P1/2 class who I at first thought too young to enter the competition, but not too young to learn about the environment. They learned about litter, pollution on land and in the sea, landfill, recycling, saving energy and reducing waste.

We recycled plastic bottles to make flowers to decorate our playground. The children appealed at a school assembly for everyone to bring bottles. They went round classes collecting them, and painted and cut them to shape them into flowers. We saved over 750 bottles from going to landfill. We had many favourable comments about our flowers from local residents and people in our community.

The children learned about the impact of the weather on the planet, and how food is sourced. They planted their own crops, and produced various plants, which they sampled and gave as gifts to people in the community.

 As the project progressed, the children were eager to make a film to inform others, and encourage everyone to take care of our planet. Our friends in the other Primary 1 class were keen to have a part in our film, so for them to be involved the class had to get them up to speed with all they had learned.

 Children in the class faced various barriers to learning, more than half had English as a second language, 8 of them spoke no English at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless every member of the class took an enthusiastic and active part in the project. By the end of the project every child was able to have a speaking role in the film, although some of the filming was done one word at a time, and in some cases one syllable at a time.

 We faced some challenges. Unfortunately our tattie crop was affected by frost, resulting in a poor yield. A lesson in itself! Children moved house and left school, but new children arrived and were keen to be involved.

 We are lucky to be in the city centre and close to the beach where we took the opportunity to film. Every time we filmed, our beach looked stunning, but on return to school we discovered the sound quality too poor. Time was running out, and on our last attempt we arrived after a massive storm to discover the beach strewn with washed up debris. My initial reaction was that we did not want to show our beautiful beach in such a poo**r** light. However after a quick discussion and script change we were able to turn it to our advantage and highlight the dangers of dumping litter in the sea.

 Our film was titled ‘Aliens from Planet Green Land in Aberdeen’. Parents were given the opportunity to come and see the DVD. All were very proud of their child’s achievements, with many of them saying their child now insisted they recycle. The positive effects of this project are obviously far reaching, with 5 year olds teaching their parents. Everyone in school had the opportunity to see our DVD and the environmental lesson it delivers, and every child in class took a copy home. Our DVDs were watched not only in Aberdeen, but sent to relatives in many corners of the world-including England, where it was being shown in a pub in Blackpool by a proud Granny. In May we crossed our fingers and sent away our entry.

The class took part in Oxfam’s Water Week, and decided to sell our DVD to raise money for this worthwhile cause. They manned a stall at our Summer Fair, and in Total made £250. This money helped provide small scale farmers in Liberia with everything they need to grow enough food to make a living.

In June we were thrilled to be chosen as not only Regional Winners, but also Regional Champions for Scotland in the Total Green School Awards 2013. On the 20th June, 26 children left our school at 4.30AM and flew to London to give a short presentation and receive our prize at the Science Museum.

Our day in London was a class trip of a lifetime thanks to the generosity of Total, the hard work of staff at Total and The Young People’s Trust for the Environment. Needless to say a fantastic day was had by all!

The children were very proud to see their DVD being shown during the reception of the Award Ceremony. In London they were excellent ambassadors for their school and city. Many commented on their high standard of behaviour and the outstanding achievement for such young children.

Winning this prestigious award brought many benefits to our class and the whole school, and has had a very positive impact on the children, staff and community as a whole. Everyone was happy for us, and we made new friends.

We went to the beach for a celebratory ice cream, where a gentleman in the queue overheard the reason for our celebration, and he invited us all to his Fish and Chip shop in Inverurie for a free meal. Unfortunately it was too close to the end of term for us to take him up on his generous offer.

 We were invited to the Children’s & Young Peoples Services Award at the Beach Ballroom in September 2013, where we were presented with the Sandra Burnett Award for Environmental Awareness. We were runners up in Aberdeen City Council Eco Awards.

We have formed very good community and business links. Total have been very good to us. As a school, we have become more environmentally aware. Last term we took part in a whole school effort to clean up the beach, with the nursery children picking up litter around the local area. Our flowers are showing signs of age, so we are embarking on a renewal programme by recycling as many plastic bottles as we can.

This project had a very positive impact on the children, and they showed initiative, creativity and responsibility throughout. Their achievement will not show up on school attainment statistics, but I think a project like this is what Curriculum for Excellence is about. They have acquired attitudes, skills, knowledge and values that I am sure will stay with them. This project has ensured that they are confident individuals, successful learners, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

For me, this was the most exciting and worthwhile project I have done with a class. What could be more important than saving the planet for future generations? There is so much you can do with older children who can read, write and do their own research. However there is plenty age appropriate materials for younger children. One big advantage of teaching environmental issues to younger children is that they can then carry their message throughout school and beyond. You don’t need money, just a class of enthusiastic children as I was lucky to have. If we could do it, anyone can.