

Totally Unplugged!

Earlier this month, Grove Road Primary School in Tring took part in a 'Totally Unplugged' day, along with a number of schools across the country. This involved using as little electricity as possible or even no electricity from 8am until 8pm. It was an exciting opportunity to appreciate just how reliant we are in our day-to-day routines on electricity, from the batteries that power our phones to the electricity that pumps our water.

The initiative was developed by South Molton Community Primary School in Devon, who regularly have No Electricity Days. The aim of 'Totally Unplugged' day was to encourage as many schools and businesses as possible to turn off or save electricity, thus making a noticeable difference to the amount of electricity being used compared to the average use on a similar day.

Grove Road School entered into the spirit of the day by switching off as many electrical items as was safe to do, including lights, whiteboards, computers and even kitchen appliances. Children in year 1 took all the milks from the fridge and carefully put them into cool bags (see photo). Cooks in the kitchen made picnic lunches for the children, instead of cooking school dinners. The school office ran a reduced service without lights and computers. There were of course certain health and safety considerations that could not be ignored, so fire alarms, phones and hot running water remained switched on.

The school also used this as an opportunity to encourage outdoor learning in the natural environment, using the amazing natural learning environment all around us. Outdoor learning calls for creative teaching, and encourages children to be imaginative in their learning, inspiring them to develop life skills.

Children were also encouraged to take part in the experiment before and after school and were awarded one house point for every half hour they managed to go electricity free out of school hours. Some families left their cars at home and travelled to school by bike; others avoided all electronic games, TV, radio and computers in favour of outdoor games, reading or board games. Those without gas ovens also opted for a BBQ dinner, so as to avoid using electric ovens.

The children reported that there were certain things they missed about not having electricity: hot dinners, lights, TV, radio and music, and electronic games. However they also said they had great fun going out on their bikes or playing in the garden when they got home from school.

Meter readings at school were taken from Monday to Thursday, so that the children could see the difference the 'Totally Unplugged' day made to energy consumption and money spent. The children were able to look at the results and see that on a normal school day, they use more than 5 times more electricity, spending 5 times more money on electricity, than on Totally Unplugged day.

Chloe Lea, Science Coordinator at Grove Road and leader of this project, commented: "It was wonderful to see how many families really got involved in the spirit of the day, and enjoyed it with the children. The adults coped (just about) without a kettle! It was a fun way to teach the children about the vital role electricity plays in our lives, as well as showing how much energy and money we save if we are careful how we use it"

