



## What pupils think By Grace Nayar Emma and Joe Weir

Most schools just have hamsters as school pets but we have much more! Our pets are animals from all over the world, such as geckos, chameleons, chinchillas and tortoises. We have lots more exotic ones too.

We asked our friends what they thought of our school animals and this is what most of them said:-

"They are unique, they are funny to watch and they make our school complete."

Our favourite is Mash who is our Yemen chameleon. We have been able to breed the chameleons and the geckos. We have been successful with many animals. We are now trying to breed our pygmy leaf chameleons.

Bits and Bobs are the adult red-footed tortoise. We have two baby red-footed tortoises in our year 6 class called Tony and Georgie.

The latest additions to the school's collection are five red-eyed tree frogs. They are so beautiful with their cat-like, tomato red eyes. They are amazing! We can't stop staring at them.... the playtime bell goes and all we want to do is stare at their mesmerising eyes. When disturbed, they flash their bulging red eyes and reveal their huge, webbed orange feet and bright blue-and-yellow flanks. This is called 'startle coloration' and may give a bird or snake a shock, allowing the frog time to jump to safety.

During the day these amphibians sleep attached to a leaf with their eyes shut and their feet tucked away, hiding their beautiful markings. They feed on tiny insects and we feed them on fruit flies and small crickets.

Sometimes it is hard to keep them all in order, for example, our Berber skink is certainly an escape artist and if there is a way to escape, he'll find it! One lunchtime, we saw him make a dart for the front door, and we eventually found him in the school's secret garden. We have managed to block the hole where he had escaped with a CD holder and a book on moths!

Our animals attract many visitors eager to learn more about exotic creatures. One visitor said "I think your school is not like any other, you have a very impressive entrance and it gives a very warm welcome. It is both fantastic and wonderful."

We love having animals in the school. It's fun because we can care for them, look after them and learn about them. They are one of the many wonderful things about our school. They are lots of fun and it's nice to know you have something to care for. They are really cool to watch, ace to hold and if you're lonely at playtime although they may not answer, they're great to talk to. San Sior would not be San Sior without our animals. To us, our animals are family.

We have all our pets because it's Mr Jones' passion. If it was not for him, we would just be part of an ordinary school! San Sior is much more to us and everyone here as a result.



*In Verse*  
These two haikus – Japanese poems with strict rules – were written by Year 3 pupils.

**Chameleon**  
Kaleidoscope skin.  
He wears his shark-fin helmet  
and wears it with pride.

**Pacman Frog**  
Two periscope eyes,  
He sits and waits for his prey.  
Hardly ever moves.



► had caught in their respective potatoes. Unfortunately, too many children leave our schools unable to differentiate between a millipede and a centipede, or distinguish a foxglove from rosebay willow herb!

We set moth traps in the school grounds each week, to see which species we can attract to the light. There are also pond-dipping sessions almost every lunchtime to study newts, dragonfly nymphs, sticklebacks and such like, and we have recently bought an underwater camera and monitor to study the pond life in greater detail, below the water surface.

Cameras have also been installed in purpose-built blue tit boxes, so the children can have an insight into what

goes on inside the nest, and watch the chicks being reared. They can also work outdoors in all weathers, thanks to sturdy oak cabins built with locally sourced oak. A fox has built its den outside Year 2's flower garden.

With the Great Orme Nature reserve (and its silver-studded blue butterflies) on the school's doorstep and surrounded by beautiful beaches, combined with regular visits up some of the magnificent mountains in Snowdonia National Park, it is little wonder that the children look back at their primary education with fond memories. I hope what we teach here in terms of environmental awareness will stay with them through their lives.



## Views of parents...

"A friend of mine recently told me, after her first visit to Ysgol San Sior, that it's like visiting a farm! When you walk into the school reception, you are given a friendly welcome not just by the kind and lovely staff and children who will politely greet and hold open a door for you.

Then there is the whole range of unexpected creatures: chameleons, geckos, fish, tortoises and things I do not yet know the names of, but that my daughter who attends the school does!

I love the fact that when I send my daughter - and my son before her - to school, she learns not only maths and English and reading comprehension and all the normal things you learn at school, to a very high level, but also gets to learn about the world around her in a hands-on way.

She gets to plant and harvest vegetables that then go onto children's plates at dinner times. (Seeing my daughter come home from school with rosy cheeks and muddy wellies makes me so happy). She gets to feed and care for chickens, and again, the eggs produced go on to be used in the school canteen.

She gets to handle and care for creatures from other countries; just a couple of weeks ago, I came to pick her up from the school's Eco Club and she had a huge chameleon climbing up her arm. It is wonderful! I would never be able to give her these experiences.

At the recent school fair, I had wrappers and bits of foil from sweets and was looking around for somewhere to put all this trash - momentarily forgetting that they have no rubbish bins! You have to stop and think about the rubbish that you have, and then sort it into the proper recycling containers. There is no laziness about waste at Ysgol San Sior.

A couple of years ago, the children and staff built a greenhouse out of discarded plastic bottles and now they are moving onto making a shed out of plastic bottles filled up with plastic film that cannot be recycled, but helps to improve the insulation of the building. This is such a great way, I feel, to help not only children to be aware of how much waste we produce, but their parents too. So I am getting an education as well as my daughter!

I have volunteered in quite a few schools and kids clubs around Wales and I have never come across a place that is just so committed to reducing their carbon footprint. I am impressed."

*Christine Gill, mum of Freya.*

"When you enter the school's front door, you are immediately aware that this is no ordinary school. You are greeted by various types of exotic wildlife, including chameleons, geckos, tortoises and fish which never fail to engage my fascination, as well as my children's. I have a beautiful picture of my 6 year old with a chameleon on his arm. Where else could he have such a unique opportunity?"

*Dawn McGuinness, mum of Liam.*

"We have 2 children at the school, in year 2 and reception class, and since starting there, they have both flourished both educationally and personally. When we looked round the school, we were amazed at the range of animals and eco facilities as our older daughter was educated at another school when she was of primary age. The difference between the two schools and their eco values was a complete contrast, with San Sior winning hands down.

Our two youngest children have been taught how to care for the animals in the school and the environment around them, with our youngest daughter (age 5) being very excited last week, coming home telling us that she had been learning about animals. Mr Jones had brought one of his toads into her class, giving them a real life experience of an animal hopping around the classroom - how many head teachers bring toads into school on a regular basis?

The school has a wide range of animals from chickens to chameleons and stick insects, with many unusual species being housed around the school. There is also a butterfly garden, as well as many other outdoor areas including a new wooden science hut and a greenhouse made out of plastic bottles which the children were encouraged to collect from home and it was then built by the children. Pupils get to experience the outdoors in all weathers, showing the school's commitment to nature & the environment."

*Mr & Mrs D Wharfe, parents of Max and Pollyanna Wharfe.*

"Our son is four years old and has been attending Ysgol San Sior, Llandudno for nearly a year now. He really enjoys his time at school. He comes home most days telling us that he has been learning about animals and places of the world. How he spends time with the other children in the school garden, learning about the animals and insects in the garden, where they live and the noises/calls they make. How the children and the teacher go in the school oak cabin to learn about new places. He also often talks about the greenhouse at the school made totally of recycled plastic bottles."

*Mr Ralph Marshall,  
Oliver's dad.*



## Why not elsewhere

The question is why is this type of educational model not being pursued in other schools through the UK? Clearly, the children at Ysgol San Sior are getting an unparalleled insight at a young age into our planet and its rich diversity, in terms of the plant and animal life that exists, and why it should be conserved.

They are being taught too about the responsibilities of caring for pets, as well as the remarkable diversity that exists in the case of reptiles and amphibians. This represents a whole new learning experience that can only have a positive benefit for pupils throughout their lives.

Just as interestingly perhaps, parents too are clearly sharing this learning experience with their children. There are many situations where owning a cat or dog is not possible for a variety of reasons. Here is further indisputable evidence - if it were needed - of the benefits of having reptiles, amphibians or invertebrates instead.

David Alderton

