

## NORTH CORNWALL ACADEMY “SUPERKIDS” TAKE THEIR SKILLS AND ENTHUSIASM TO ONE OF THE COUNTRY’S SMALLEST ZOOS

North Cornwall Academy is part of the WAVE Multi Academy Trust. It is situated in Bodmin and offers a range of academic and vocational subjects to a number of primary and secondary school students. Some of the qualifications that are on offer are Land based Studies and Animal Care. What makes this possible is a fantastic collaboration between the school and Dartmoor Zoo that welcomes students every week providing a valuable outdoor experience. Learning and spending time outdoors has a positive impact on students’ mental health, helps them develop social skills and builds positive relationships.

The ‘**Super Kids**’ from Wave's North Cornwall Academy temporarily swapped their ground breaking project at Dartmoor Zoo for a visit to Shaldon Wildlife Trust in Devon after receiving an invitation from one of the keepers at the charity to visit the zoo and help out with a construction task.

The invite followed a presentation by the group of North Cornwall students about their educational project which has seen the youngsters leaving their classrooms one day a week to work alongside the staff at Dartmoor Zoo.

The academy is part of the WAVE Multi Academy Trust which provides high quality education for pupils in Devon and Cornwall who have been excluded from school or who are not in school for medical reasons. Teacher Andy Wilson introduced the Dartmoor Zoo project two years ago to help build the confidence, self-esteem and motivation of pupils.

The project has seen the students spending every Thursday working alongside members of the Zoo’s maintenance team to carry out a range of practical tasks ranging from digging drains, laying underground pipes and making manholes, to edging and filling in holes in paths, mixing concrete and mortar and building fences. A second group works with members of the Zoo’s Education Department each Tuesday on a programme which focuses on academic study rather than practical skills. There are

modules on animal husbandry, studying zoo animals, as well as Maths and English qualifications.

The students and staff were invited to talk about the success of their project at the South West Zoo's Education Conference earlier this year. A member from Shaldon Wildlife Trust, one of the smallest zoos in the country, set in an acre of gardens on the Ness headland just above the fishing village of Shaldon on the A379 Torquay to Teignmouth road, was in the audience.

**“The Shaldon staff were so impressed by the students they decided to ask them to come to the Zoo as part of this year's National Volunteers' Week” said Andy Wilson. “Shaldon may be one of the smallest zoos in the country, but they certainly utilise their space well.”**

**“They are part of international breeding programmes for some unusual and endangered species. During their visit the students were lucky enough to see five species of lemur, civets, numerous monkeys, tree shrews and other unusual species. They also had a guided tour of three species of Loris and had the opportunity to meet a three banded armadillo. “**

The visit was not just about admiring the animals though – the Shaldon staff had identified a number of tasks they wanted the Cornish youngsters to help with.

**“Our job was to remove old rotten path edging beside the agouti and conjure enclosures, dig trenches and cut new railway sleepers to build a new edge whilst also putting in supportive fence posts” said Andy. “The students worked very hard and the zoo staff were shocked at how much we achieved in a short amount of time (about three times what they expected).”**

The hard working group certainly impressed staff at Shaldon Wildlife Trust as they have been invited to go back again in the future.

**“The whole team did an impressive job” said Lia Summers, education officer and keeper at Shaldon, “they were a real pleasure to work with and truly took pride in their work.”**

The project's unique mix of academic, social and practical activities, coupled with the enthusiasm and support of zoo staff and, of course, access to the animals, is transforming the lives of the young people taking part and Andy Wilson is delighted at the opportunity to share its success with other schools and zoos and wildlife parks.

**“Some of these youngsters have always been told they are no good. By giving them an opportunity to excel at something and treating them as equals, we gain their trust and respect. This encourages them to take pride in what they are doing and helps build their confidence and self-esteem.”**