

Helping Balmain Public School become a more sustainable school

Report prepared for Balmain Public School P&C, March 2020

On 5 February 2020, Shehana Darda-Teixeira attended the Balmain Public School P&C Meeting and asked what action the school and the P&C were taking to support climate action. She offered, and was invited to, prepare a report to present to the P&C Meeting on 4 March 2020 about what steps BPS might take.

A group of 10 parents volunteered to help prepare the report and investigate what other schools, locally, interstate and around the world are doing to create a more sustainable school environment, take action on climate change and empower our children.

The findings and recommendations are set out in this report. They aim to build on previous efforts and initiatives undertaken by staff, students and families, including the Environmental Warriors and recycling initiatives, Clean Up Australia campaign and the recently announced plans for gardening groups. These recommendations will also support teachers and their educational programs in addressing sustainability throughout key learning areas, as outlined by Sarah Weston at the February P&C meeting.

We would like the P&C members to vote on accepting the first two recommendations so that we can proceed with further investigation and development of an action plan.

Recommendations for action:

Priority

1. Create a Climate and Sustainability Subcommittee of the P&C Association;
2. Ask the Climate and Sustainability Committee to develop a detailed plan to help BPS reduce water, energy and waste consumption and support climate action, which might include the other recommendations contained within this report. The plan shall include an outline of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and resources required to implement the plan;
3. Set a target that by 2025 Balmain Primary School becomes the most sustainable school in the Inner West with a plan led by students and the community with support from staff.

Once a Sustainability Subcommittee is established, they should consider the following recommendations:

1. Introduce a new separate bin for the collection of NSW Container Deposit Scheme eligible containers – Return & Earn. Encourage students to bring bottles in and when full, bin to be picked up by Sustainability Committee volunteer and money earned returned to the P&C for the Sustainability Committee. We are aware this was trialled by Miss Pauline and we will seek to understand any potential issues and how to ensure its success going forward.
2. Continue to eliminate single use plastics from P&C events and work to also implement for all other school events and the canteen. We note that the P&C has already eliminated single use plastic and uses Ikea cups, bamboo cutlery and paper products at its events. Some classes have had parent volunteers to support use of the Ikea cups and eliminate plastic at class parties. We would work with staff and students to eliminate plastic waste at all fundraising and class/ school events. We will work with all external providers to also reduce plastic use within the canteen.
3. Introduce a worm farm for food scraps. The school already collects daily food scraps and puts into its compost bins.

4. Investigate a partnership with the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden program. We will work with the teachers and students involved with the school gardening groups to see what opportunities exist here.
5. Investigate and purchase Energy Monitors throughout the school to reduce energy consumption.
6. Look to introduce no waste lunch days (naked food – no packaging to be bought into school), start with two days a week.
7. Encourage more students and staff to cycle and walk to school, investigate cycle safely courses for students, establish local bike or walk buses, reminders about road safety at school assemblies. Encourage walking groups and support Walk Safely to School day (15 May 2020).
8. Include quick update on our sustainability program during speeches at all P&C events.
9. School to watch 'Plastic Alarm', <https://plasticfreeboy.global/> and the children to skype Arlian (plastic boy) to ask questions. Investigate other opportunities to screen films/documentaries that support learning outcomes around sustainability.
10. Investigate our membership with the Sustainable Schools website – what resources are currently being used?
11. Create a student led green group (Environmental Warriors) – work with students to implement/ monitor recommendations and initiatives. Encourage student leadership and student-led initiatives.
12. Include discussion about the sustainability program at school assemblies every week.
13. Work with students and teachers to develop ideas to support existing sustainability campaigns such as a clothes swap for National Recycling Week (9-15 November 2020).
14. Provide funding for every classroom (or dedicated section in the library) to have access to books and resources on climate change and sustainability. Subcommittee to compile booklist and investigate funding options.
15. Accelerate inclusion in the Inner West Council's solar panel program and check what other resources they offer.
16. Set up a permanent Terracycle collection point within the school noting in previous years, we've had temporary Terracycle/toothbrush, toothpaste and dental products recycling.
17. Seek ideas from students, teachers, staff and parents/carers for the Subcommittee to consider and include in an action plan.

Background:

A group of 11 parents volunteered to investigate what other schools, locally, interstate and around the world are doing to create a more sustainable school environment, take action on climate change and empower our children.

The primary schools we looked at include Crown Street (Surry Hills), Forest Lodge, Bourke St, Rozelle, Birchgrove, Lane Cove, Appin, Bargo, Balgowlah, Darlinghurst and schools in Melbourne, Hobart, Belgium, New Zealand and the UK.

The recommendations we've put forward for Balmain are all already in place in other schools. The feedback from other schools about the school community's reception to the actions were largely positive. While behaviour change can be slow and difficult for some, on the whole, students in particular embraced the opportunity to make a difference.

The great news is that there is a lot happening and lots we can learn to improve our own efforts.

This is an important step for us to take because it's our children who will be the ones that have to deal with the brunt of climate change, and many are already experiencing anxiety about the issue.

We don't want our children to feel hopeless – it's important to show them that there are ways of mitigating the impact of climate change and to help them shape the future they stand to inherit.

Showing them that their school and community is taking this issue seriously and giving them the tools to take their own actions, empowers them to understand the natural world and to see themselves as part of it, as well as gives them the chance to engage with it and help it.

An important resource in preparing this report was the Australian Psychological Society Guide for parents about the climate crisis (see attached). This quote explains the importance of parent and community led action:

“Maintaining a hopeful outlook is an important way of helping us to cope with the scary reality of the climate crisis at the same time as helping us to keep thinking of things we can do to bring about the best possible outcome. Psychologists also call this ‘meaning-focused coping’, which refers to the importance of trying to create meaning and purpose out of a very difficult situation like climate change.

Research, think and talk with children about the concrete, plausible solutions which are already available to drastically reduce carbon emissions, like wind power, solar farms and electric cars.

Remember how other big problems around the world have been solved, just by lots of good people getting out there, working together, and demanding it, and share these stories with your children. Some good examples are the abolishment of slavery and apartheid, marriage equality, and women's vote.”

Report developed and supported by the following parents:

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Some examples of school led action being undertaken by other schools are set out in Appendix 1. Some available resources to assist the school community are set out in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1: Other examples of school led action include:

Creating an Organic Veggie Box Group within the school community

https://www.myorganicschool.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAm4TyBRDgARIsAOU75sqqUaN5LJ0OC1C6eQR74Wzc6RGoqSvvHSKlafoPZ6RuvtbjiRyT06UaAgL4EALw_wcB

Using reusable cups purchased from Ikea and removing single use plastic where possible (such as the canteen). We organised a beach clean and have student Eco Warriors.

Recycling – reduce the amount of landfill and improve recycling

Daily explicit reminder to all pupils in assembly re which litter goes into which bin (hold up piece of rubbish and ask which bin)

Bin monitors to help guide younger pupils

Art class focused on Earth Day and used recycling to create artwork

Classes who remember to turn everything off get an Eco Ticket and go into a prize draw for a canteen voucher and title of Environment King/Queen.

Incorporated the amounts of landfill/recycling into maths classes through data collection
Eco-committee led by school leadership team.

Planting and now pruning native trees.

Build a pizza oven for events and a greenhouse to grow food for the pizzas.

Develop a policy about sustainability for the school, including all events at the school.

Increase knowledge and understanding of climate change across the school community

Reduce volume of printing and offset the school's annual printing consumption by planting trees on the school site or by pledges made by others.

Increase overall recycling and seek a reduction in energy consumption through improved recycling facilities and improved behaviour across students and staff.

Improve drinking water facilities around the school in order to reduce single use plastic water bottles.

Increase number of pupils and staff cycling and walking to school to create more sustainable transport.

Compiled a short list of questions to encourage staff and students to act in accordance with a crisis, that can be displayed around the school.

Students:

- Can I walk or bike to school? Can I take the bus or train? Can I car-share?
- Do I need to buy single use plastic? Do I have a re-usable water bottle?
- Do I strive to look after my pens, books and other belongings in order to avoid unnecessary waste?

Staff:

- Resources – do I need to print it? Can I reduce it to use less paper? Can I reuse it at a later date?
- Do I recycle, and encourage the pupils to recycle?
- Do I positively promote the “reduce, reuse, repair, & recycle” motto? Do I positively promote the required shift in mind-set?

Write letters to local politicians and/or councillors.

Encouraging zero emissions transport.

Choosing zero/low emissions purchases.

Meat-free day at the canteen one day a week.

Holding a Positive Climate Action day at school.

Kids taking all these ideas home (doing with family / friends / extracurricular activities, etc).

Teacher's room off grid (solar energy).

More lessons about the climate crisis and possible solutions, pupils make videos to teach each other, lessons about ethical banking and send letters to bank institutions to ask to stop investing in fossil fuels.

Melbourne Girls' College is getting rid of all its bins and asking students to take their rubbish home in a bold bid to encourage them to move towards zero waste.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/victoria/bins-out-at-melbourne-school-as-students-told-to-take-all-rubbish-home-20190826-p52kw9.html>

No electricity between lunch and school end every Friday

Installing solar panels, planting trees and implementing a new biomass digester, which transforms all food waste into a powdered bio-fuel

Double-sided printing, and re-using single-sided paper

Creating a herb garden, building bird boxes and bird feeders for the school's natural habitat of birds.

Twinning with a school in another area to share ideas on eco-friendly ideas.

Project with Walkers Crisps and Terracycle to recycle crisp packets. Linked with Dojo app to encourage collection and recycle, then awarded points for the students / classes.

Walk to school day "Happy Shoes Day", and targeting drivers/parents outside the school with their engines running.

Students making their own wax wraps to be used instead of plastic wrap.

Lane Cove Public School:

- Launched a reusable bag project, recycling old t-shirts into bags that can be sold and used instead of plastic bags
- Woolworths allowed the school to set up a "recycle your t-shirt here" point at the local Lane Cove branch and provided them with a space in store to sell the bags too

<https://inthecove.com.au/2018/12/07/lane-cove-public-school-launches-the-tag-i-t-lane-cove-company/>

Schools Framework written by Monash University

Includes: Meat Free Monday, Transport Tuesday, Watch-it Wednesday

https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/7-ways-teachers-and-schools-can-support-student-action-on-climate-change?fbclid=IwAR2PwAEXOLfSyc5kGhCsYRFaGFQqUoSKqpOSsnqEb_2QH-LjgGyi4FxDjal

Appendix 2: Resources

ECO SCHOOLS (part of Keep Australia Beautiful)

- An education programme teaching students how to become environmentally aware citizens - empowering students to make positive change
 - \$100 +gst per annum for Eco-School membership
 - 80 grants of \$3500 are awarded each year to school projects in Australia
 - Global movement of 52,000 schools in 68 countries around the world
 - The Litter Legends Campaign for 2020 – Receive \$500 grant to jump start litter reduction in your school
- <https://www.eco-schools.org.au/grants>

KEEP AUSTRALIA BEAUTIFUL NSW

Plenty of resources available for schools and communities

EnviroMentors is an incursion-based educator running workshops for schools and other groups. Often free and supported by council.

https://www.kabnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2001_EnviroMentors_PSchools_brochure.pdf

TAKE ME OUTSIDE NSW

This campaign aims to get kids across NSW playing and learning outdoors, connecting with nature and gaining knowledge about their environment through hands-on projects. These projects can take place on their school grounds or in a local park, community garden, bushland reserve, creek, river or beach.

Take Me Outside NSW offers a FREE 'one-stop shop' for teachers and educators to plan, deliver and evaluate their long-term, outdoor, environmental project.

- Work with Council or Landcare to plant native species and remove weeds in your local park or bushland reserve to improve habitat and biodiversity
- Work with Council to do litter clean ups of your local creek, river or beach to reduce pollution and protect biodiversity
- Partner with your local Community Garden to grow veggies and flowers to provide habitat for bees and other insects and increase local biodiversity

<https://www.takemeoutsidensw.org.au/>

Terracycle

https://www.terracycle.com/en-AU/about-terracycle/recycle_your_waste?utm_campaign=admittance&utm_medium=menu&utm_source=www.terracycle.com

ABC WAR ON WASTE - Tips for a sustainable school

1. Start with just one passion project and build up from there. Holding a clean-up afternoon is a good place to start.
2. Pick a focus topic or theme each year: it could be reducing plastic waste one year and e-waste another.
3. Collect PET bottles. If your state has a containment deposit scheme, you could be swapping bottles or cans for cash. Find an organisation to melt PET into 3D printer filament.
4. Turn old plastic water or milk bottles into plant pots or lamp shades. Stick a wooden spoon through a plastic bottle, fill it with birdseed and hang it from a tree to attract birdlife.
5. Replace non-native plants and trees with natives. They generally need less watering.
6. Get students to petition the canteen to commit to going plastic free. Compostable packaging made from sugar cane can be disposed of in compost bins.
7. Make your own compost from food scraps. It's fun and easy to make your own compost or worm farm.

8. Teach students to make beeswax wraps to package lunches in. Buy wax pellets online or get wax from local beekeepers and iron it onto textile class off-cuts.
9. Station battery and mobile phone recycling points around the school.
10. Collect old computers for students to pull apart in STEM lessons to identify parts and materials. Make art or jewellery out of the components. (Using donated computers also reduces e-waste.)
11. Fill old takeaway coffee cups with soil and propagate succulents in them for a biology lesson. Old desk drawers are great for growing rows of seedlings.
12. Create an aquaponics project, an eco-system in which plants filter the water that fish are raised in, teaching students how to grow sustainable produce at home.
13. Align your projects with the curriculum, adding real-world relevance to existing lessons. These projects can be worked on during classroom hours.
14. Pick a project leader with time and passion – it takes time to set up initiatives, find collection partners and follow-up on initiatives.
15. Support local start-ups or community groups willing to collect, recycle and turn waste into something useful. Social media is a good way to find these groups.

<https://education.abc.net.au/newsandarticles/blog/-/b/2913159/how-your-school-can-join-the-war-on-waste>

New Zealand to add climate crisis activism and eco-anxiety to the curriculum

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/13/new-zealand-schools-to-teach-students-about-climate-crisis-activism-and-eco-anxiety?CMP=tw_t_a-environment_b-gdneco&fbclid=IwAR3lqildWRGgNAPCmjAeLUoJnqdP43PjHdMj2VFJXIN-65G1REoTqpX0jUQ

<https://www.sustainableschoolsnsw.org.au/teach/climate-change>

<http://climatechangeconnection.org/resources/climate-friendly-schools/resources-for-schools/>

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/cce>

<https://www.studyinternational.com/news/climate-change-education-compulsory-schools/>

<https://theconversation.com/a-climate-change-curriculum-to-empower-the-climate-strike-generation-122841>