

Starting a Green Team

at your school



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Green Teams IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Introduction

As global resources diminish and our climate warms at an unprecedented rate, humanity is facing decisions of monumental proportions if we are to sustain our current needs and meet the needs of future generations. Education plays a vital role in ensuring that decisions made today will not be to the detriment of future generations. 'Education for sustainable development is a life-wide and life-long endeavour which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to all of us, or it will not belong to anyone' (*United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–14*).

*My opinion, my conviction,
gains infinitely in strength
and success, the moment a
second mind has adopted it.*

(McKenzie-Mohr, 1999)

At the forefront of Education for Sustainability (EfS) lies the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI). In Western Australia, AuSSI involves participants in a whole-of-school approach to sustainability and encourages learning through real life experiences. The initiative's vision is for all Australian schools and their communities to become sustainable. To read more about the initiative visit www.det.wa.edu.au/sustainableschools. AuSSI also links to existing programs and resources such as the Waste Wise Schools Program.

The Waste Wise Schools Program has been developed based on best practice EfS principles. The overarching message of the program is to reduce, reuse and recycle (the 3Rs) and to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and minimise our collective environmental footprint.

The program helps schools set up infrastructure and provides resources aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours with regard to sustainable waste management. Many Waste Wise schools have developed a whole-school approach to waste minimisation and education whereby students are empowered to make a difference in their school community.

The following information was gathered from a small but diverse range of Perth metropolitan primary schools to provide support for existing Waste Wise schools.

The Waste Wise Schools Program would like to thank the following teachers for their expertise and support in creating this document:

- Jenny Dowie, Dawesville Catholic Primary School
- Katrina Wellstead, Landsdale Primary School
- Nicola Butler, Wirrabirra Primary School
- Kerry Brown, West Leeming Primary School
- Catherine Bishop, Ardross Primary School
- Glynis Cardy, Hampton Park Primary School
- Peta Holmes, Upper Swan Primary School
- Carolyn Press, Subiaco Primary School
- Belinda Baines, Edney Primary School
- Renie Allen, Attadale Primary School
- Marilyn Tidey, Wilson Primary School
- Peter Tresise, St Mary's School



What is a Green Team?

A Green Team is a group of students supported by teachers, parents and the wider community. The objective is to raise the profile of and tackle issues associated with environmental and social sustainability.

The concept of a Green Team is not new, and may exist in some schools already but with a different title. For example, at West Leeming Primary School what began as a Green Team has evolved into the Eco-Rangers, who meet three times a term to discuss sustainability issues. Similarly, in 2009, students from Wirrabirra Primary School developed an Environmental Monitors program through which enthusiastic and highly motivated students are able to share their knowledge with other students and with the local community.

The issues tackled by a Green Team reflect the concerns held by the team and may be influenced by other students, teachers and parents. At Landsdale Primary School some of the projects embraced by the Green Team include waste minimisation, paper recycling, aluminium can recycling, organic waste recycling and the installation of solar power and solar hot water systems. Over the course of the year more than 20 parents and grandparents have assisted students and supervised their activities. This is a great example of a school that has come a long way in a short time with excellent results.

In the early stages, the Green Team is typically teacher-centered and driven with the intention that students will eventually guide and run the program. Through their engagement in EfS, students develop an increased understanding and knowledge of issues and use this to make informed decisions about how they and the community can improve the school and local area. You will discover as you read through this information package that a Green Team in your school has the potential to empower students and enable a shared workload.

How do we get started?

Start small

The thought of taking on another project may seem daunting; however, a successful Green Team usually starts small and builds momentum.

For example, the philosophy at Ardross Primary School is "...to endeavor to find a way to make things happen, especially if they are initiated by students. Ideas often seem quite difficult to implement so we start with a small step and use the students' and sometimes parents' enthusiasm to motivate us".

There are many ways to start up a Green Team and all teachers can play an important role if they want to. By starting small, you can show other teachers that environmental projects are achievable, and how student learning is enriched through diverse experiences.

Involve others

Starting a Green Team in your school depends on working within your time constraints and available support and resources. Based on EfS principles, a Green Team ultimately will involve the whole school and branch out into the community. Choosing members will be up to the discretion of the teachers initiating the process and, as mentioned earlier, there is not a 'one size fits all' approach.



Steps to get your Green Team up and running

Plan it

If you have the support of your colleagues, you could select a Green Team from a mix of students. Representatives could be selected from each year level, and the logistics associated with setting up the team can be shared between colleagues. At some schools, students write a letter of application to become members of the Green Team. This process has the added benefit of attracting students who really want to be involved in projects and who are enthusiastic about becoming members.

One way to start planning for your Green Team is to select your own class, or a few students. Many of the responsibilities will be taken on by your students, but the positive side to this is initiating change in your class which has the potential to filter through the rest of the school. Over time, this could lead to a cultural shift in the school where sustainability practices are considered the norm and linked with the curriculum across all learning areas.

A summary of ideas to consider include:

- selecting the entire class if you do not have the immediate support of your colleagues
- selecting the entire class and have these students buddy up with younger students from other classes
- choosing two representative students from each year level
- speaking about the Green Team at an assembly and inviting students to submit an application to become a member.
- Organise a meeting time, Green Teams often meet at lunchtimes or briefly after school to carry out their tasks and discuss future plans of action.

Set it up

Once the members of the Green Team have been selected, you will need to set up a context from which the students will draw inspiration. A great way to do this is with a school waste audit. A waste audit is an evaluation of the waste that your school produces. It allows you to find out how much waste your school produces and what type of waste is produced. This information can guide where to begin your waste minimisation efforts, for example, what type of recycling to implement or what type of waste to reduce. The information gathered from a waste audit can be a valuable way to measure improvement, particularly if you implement a waste management plan. (For more information on waste audits, please contact Waste Wise for the Waste Audit toolkit.)

Run it

On completion of the waste audit, the Green Team can decide on future projects and activities. The Waste Wise Schools Program primarily supports waste minimisation and the diversion of solid waste from landfill. However, projects do not need to be limited to the topic of waste, but rather focus on the many issues associated with sustainability.



Ideas to consider when running a Green Team:

- allow students to make decisions and guide the project (see appendix 1)
- conduct a waste audit; highlight to the rest of the school the most significant types of waste and develop a strategy to deal with it. This could mean implementing a system to collect fruit and vegetable scraps for the compost, worm farm or to feed to the chickens.
- work towards a shift in control from teacher to student and allow students increased levels of decision making
- provide encouragement and offer support with project ideas
- start out with a small project and not be overly ambitious
- consider tackling local issues such as water quality monitoring and re-vegetation at nearby waterways and wetlands (Ribbons of Blue can assist in this area).

In appendix 1 you will find a document for students with eight steps on how to start a Green Team project.

Keeping it going

Many teachers question how to maintain student interest and embed projects and activities in the school culture. There are no rules but rather a combination of factors which appear to be integral to successful projects and longevity.

The following case studies contain suggestions made by schools that have successfully set up Green Teams and kept them going. See 'Maintaining student enthusiasm and Green Team longevity' on pages 9, 11 and 13 for ideas.

'We should also remember that the future is not somewhere we are going. It is something we are creating. Every day we do things that make some futures more probable and others less likely'

(Wood, A and Wood, R, 2007)



Green Teams in action

Thanks goes to the following schools for providing information to assist other schools in their quest to establish a Green Team.

Dawesville Catholic Primary School

How and when did it all begin?

In 2006, Brother Ollie Picket from Wheelchairs for Kids visited Dawesville Catholic Primary School. Following his inspirational talk, students began collecting ring pulls to raise funds for wheelchairs for children in disadvantaged countries. In 2007, the school began to collect aluminium cans and the funds raised were donated to the same cause.

In 2008, a parent voiced an interest in the school becoming a sustainable school and consequently the principal, parents and interested teachers formed a committee. The committee drew up a plan which included all aspects of recycling, the introduction of a garden centre and a scope and sequence program directly related to EfS.

The staff at Dawesville Catholic Primary School believe that all children should become waste conscious, and aware of their role in taking care of the environment. This awareness and new knowledge is then transferable to their parents and the wider community. The school has since applied for and received two Waste Wise grants, enabling them to establish a garden centre for growing fruit and vegetables, several worm farms, a separate chook run, a garden shed and an area to store recycled materials.

Staff, parent and community support

All teachers play an important role in the school's sustainability program. Staff have learned new ideas and highlighted potential challenges for their own program following visits to other Waste Wise schools. All teachers have nominated an area for their class to become involved in (see whole school involvement) and they all support one another. Throughout the course of the year, interested parents are encouraged to assist where necessary.

Links with the curriculum

The Environment Committee is comprised of three teachers who coordinate the school's sustainability program. In 2009, these teachers nominated to devise and run their own programs. The committee created a Scope and Sequence chart which linked topics from the school's existing Science Overview to strategies and goals for each year level. The Scope and Sequence chart was used again in 2010 in conjunction with Primary Connections. The school has an environment teacher who spends each afternoon working with classes to actively involve them in the EfS program.

Learning is pleasurable but doing is the height of enjoyment.

(McKenzie-Mohr, 1999)





The Green Team process

The Environmental Committee members are selected by teachers in each class, with each class completing tasks specific to them. This selection process is ideal because each class has their own jobs to complete. For example, the Worm Warriors tend to the worms and the Chook Champs take care of the school's chickens. Once the students are educated about their roles, they are enthusiastic and need little encouragement to complete their tasks.

A buddy system is in place where every younger child is paired off with a senior child. This process has been a success because it fosters the concept of students teaching students. Every Friday the buddy classes work together in the garden centre to plant, weed or harvest the vegetables.

Other activities the Environment Committee has been involved with include Clean Up Australia Day and National Tree Planting Day. The school also works with the local Shire on projects and is currently working with Men of the Trees on a coastal re-vegetation project.

As a direct result of these environmental practices at school, teachers have discovered that many students have planted vegetables and are composting or are farming worms at home.

Maintaining student enthusiasm and Green Team longevity

The principal supports and drives all policies, including the environmental policy, and his enthusiasm is transferred to students and teachers alike. The school has a number of key players, notably several environmentally conscious teachers and the canteen manager. In 2010, a teacher was placed in the position of environment teacher to further ensure that EfS practices are not only maintained but nurtured and continuously incorporated into the curriculum.

Student enthusiasm appears to be primarily driven by intrinsic reward as they are excited and enthusiastic about their roles and need little encouragement. The students are all responsible for their special area and feel proud of their achievements. Various classes speak about their particular program at school assemblies as well as write articles for the newsletter. In an effort to reduce the amount of plastic wrap and bags in lunch boxes, students receive bonus points in the school incentive program named the Dawesville Dynamos.



Chook Champs Charlie, Jake, Cameron and Abbey looking after hens Coco and Cinnamon.

Whole School involvement

What follows is a breakdown of how the whole school is involved.

- The Year 6/7 classes are the Can Crushers and Friends of the Fruit Trees.
- The Year 4/5 classes are the Worm Warriors and the Chook Champs.
- The Year 3 class collect the ring-pulls.
- The Year 2 class collects all recycled paper from each classroom and places in one recycling bin.
- The Year 1 class collects recycled materials and mobile phones.

Environmental philosophy

The environmental philosophy at Dawesville Catholic Primary School is based on respect for the environment. A future goal for the school is to reduce the amount of waste generated by approximately 70 per cent, thus contributing significantly to the amount of waste diverted from landfill.

Landsdale Primary School

How and when did it all begin?

In 2008, several staff members from Landsdale Primary School attended a Waste Wise Professional Development day. A waste audit was then planned and implemented by the Year 7 students. The results became a significant component of the Maths (Measurement, Number, Chance and Data) and English (Listening and Speaking, Viewing) programs for that term. In 2008, the school was successful in applying for and receiving the \$2,000 Waste Wise infrastructure grant. A committee was formed and a Waste Wise policy put into place. In 2009, the Year 4s were assigned the position of Super Worm Rangers and given the responsibility of maintaining all aspects of the school's worm farms and composting systems.

The desire to educate students in a proactive and hands-on manner about environmental concerns was the inspiration behind setting up a Green Team. Teachers believe that 'to be successful in preparing our students to be part of the global community we must begin to educate them about sustainability and environmental concerns'.



Feeding and watering the worms. Anika, Ella and Sarah explain that one day every second term, a large plastic sheet is laid out and the castings are separated from the worms for collection.

Staff, parent and community support

The role of the Waste Wise teacher includes developing the Waste Wise policy, completing grant applications and supervising students. Both parents and grandparents also assist in supervising the students as they perform their duties and are rotated using a fortnightly roster.

Many families have now started their own worm farms, with worms from the school helping them get started. Parents also supply food scraps, milk bottles (for worm leachate) and shredded paper for the worm farms. During the course of the summer holidays, the school has six families that volunteer a week out of their own time to come into school and tend to the gardens and worm farms.

Links with the curriculum

Links with the curriculum are implemented when subject matter can easily be integrated.

The Green Team process

In the early stages of the process, all Year 4 students were selected as members of the Green Team and trained accordingly. These highly motivated students embraced the responsibility with enthusiasm. As Year 4 students, their knowledge, skills and commitment remain in the school for a further three years.

The Year 4 students have been responsible for setting up two small worm farms in the kindergarten and pre-primary areas and have taught the teachers and students how to care for and maintain them. This is another fine example of students teaching students.



The school also has a Year 7 Environment Committee which has worked independently on recycling projects. A focus for the school over the coming years is to have the two teams work collaboratively on school sustainability projects.

Projects the Green Team and Environment Committee have been involved with include:

- waste minimisation
- paper recycling
- aluminium can recycling
- organic waste recycling
- Power Rangers – switching off lights etc
- rainwater tanks for toilet blocks
- solar power for administration computer network
- solar hot water systems.



A salute from The Super Worm Rangers – fantastic work, you are all champions!

Maintaining student enthusiasm and Green Team longevity

The following have been attributed to the success and longevity of the Green Team:

- having Year 4 students as the Green Team members
- encouraging parents to be involved
- allowing the organising teachers to work collaboratively in a double classroom (with the doors open) to assist children or leave the room when necessary
- encouraging any person who has an interest to be involved regardless of their role in the school
- having a program that is child-centered and valued to ensure that, should teachers leave, the school will encourage and support someone to pick up the role
- funding through the Waste Wise Schools Program.

Whole school involvement

- Every class completed an incursion from the Wormshed.
- The kindergarten and pre-primary classes are gardening, composting and keeping small worm farms.
- The Year 7 Committee has an Environment Minister, who along with their committee, collect ring-pulls for Wheelchairs for Kids, aluminium cans and recycled paper waste.
- All students are asked to place their organic waste in collection bins for the worm farms and compost.

Environmental philosophy

Many of the staff at Landsdale Primary School are aware of and concerned about the state of the environment. This has fostered a need to educate students in a positive hands-on approach while maintaining a positive attitude when dealing with issues related to social and environmental sustainability.

Wirrabirra Primary School

How and when did it all begin?

The Wirrabirra Environmental Monitors program began in Term 1 of 2009. The program was put into place to provide support to the school's Environmental Coordinator. Since its conception, the Environmental Monitors have hosted events for other schools, organised fundraisers, run fresh food stalls and passed on their knowledge to other students and the community.

Staff, parent and community support

The school's Waste Wise Committee supports Environmental Monitors' projects, and therefore support from other teachers has grown over time. Having the Environmental Monitors across the classes demonstrates to other teachers how important this role is. Both parents and the community have assisted with busy bees and working groups, and parents continue to assist with gardening duties and help run stalls.



Students learn to appreciate fresh produce and where it comes from when caring for the school's hens.

Links with the curriculum

A personal learning plan developed by the Environmental Coordinator for the Environmental Monitors is linked with the Outcomes and Standard Framework. (Copies of these are available from the Waste Wise Schools Program.)

The Green Team process

To become an Environmental Monitor each student submits a letter of application, which is then reviewed by the school's Waste Wise committee. Twelve students are then selected. This process of selection attracts individuals with a passion for the environment and excludes students who might otherwise be looking for an escape from regular schoolwork.

Projects the Environmental Monitors are involved in include:

- harvesting produce from the vegetable garden and selling at fresh food stalls
- sowing and caring for vegetables and fruit trees
- caring for the chickens
- organising events such as Adopt an Animal and other fundraisers
- playing host to other schools
- speaking at assemblies
- planning and designing the permaculture gardens.

The participating students really enjoy and embrace their role as Environmental Monitors. As a result of their involvement with projects at school many students have inspired their parents to become involved with growing vegetables, keeping chickens, maintaining worm farms, composting and recycling at home.



Members of Permaculture Project at Wirrabirra School (PAWS) Narice, Siew-bee and Tanayaa all tooled up and ready to get to work in the permaculture garden.

Maintaining student enthusiasm and Green Team longevity

Members of the Environmental Monitors are all highly motivated individuals who embrace projects with much enthusiasm. Students are rewarded with a sense of pride, especially when playing host to other schools. Support from external agencies such as Waste Wise, The Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI), Healthway and the local council also contribute to the program’s longevity.

Whole school involvement

All classes are involved with the Environmental Monitors program. A detailed timetable lists all job requirements for each day under separate categories. These are excellent documents and Wirrabirra Primary School is happy to share them with you.

Environmental philosophy

At Wirrabirra Primary School, the environmental philosophy is based on respecting the earth and being custodians of the earth’s diverse range of plants and animals. To quote the school’s environmental teacher, “It is our job to adjust the attitudes of society so they have more of an understanding about various environmental programs and the importance of their success.”

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Appendix 1

How to get your green team started – Student instructions

Step 1 A Visioning activity

Visualize your desired outcome: Brainstorm, discuss and write a summary of your desired outcome for your specific topic (in this instance, waste reduction in your school).

A good visioning activity here would be to imagine that there is simply no more space available for landfill sites (this has already occurred in other countries). Imagine also that the only places now available are the large open spaces at schools (the ovals). How would you manage the waste so that the oval did not disappear under a sea of rubbish? Remember to consider the 3Rs in this process, reduce, reuse and recycle, have fun and be creative.

Step 2 Research ways to be green

Visit your library and/or use the internet to learn how your school can become green. Ask your teacher to log you on the Waste Wise website where you can read about what other schools are doing or what they have already done.

Step 3 Talk with your principal

Arrange a meeting with your principal to share your goals. Make sure you have your plans and all of the relevant information you have gathered.

Step 4 Gather interested students to become green team members

You can not save the world all by yourself; you will need the help from others. Talk to your classmates and see who is really interested in becoming a member. Think about putting together a number of questions to ask the students who show an interest in becoming members.

Step 5 Organise an environmental audit of your school

Work with the members of your green team, your principal, your teacher and maybe a parent or two

to organise an environmental audit of your school. Consider conducting your first audit on the waste your school produces. This is a great way to see what is going in the rubbish bin and what items could be reduced, reused and recycled. The Waste Wise Schools Program will assist you in conducting a waste audit.

Step 6 Put together a plan of action

Based upon the results of your waste audit, write a report. Make sure you include diagrams, photographs and any other interesting and relevant information. As a green team, decide how you will present the information. For example, a poster maybe a good format to deliver your results to the whole school. You must now come up with some solutions to deal with your waste problem, so work as a team and brainstorm some ideas. Be sure to present your results and solution ideas to your principal before presenting to the rest of the school.

Step 7 Organise a school-wide event

Once you have an action plan and a waste audit has been conducted, organise an event at school to share your ideas and results. This may simply mean presenting at a whole school assembly or on a larger scale, it could be part of school sustainability fair.

Step 8 Put your action plan into action!

Now that you have an action plan, it is time to walk the talk. The results from your waste audit will give you a great place to begin. Think about how you can use the results to begin improving the waste problem in your school. To do this you must first look at the different waste streams and think about how to deal with each. For example, if you have a lot of fruit and vegetable scraps you may need to organise collection of these for the worm farm or compost system. There may be canteen items (such as plastic cups) that could be replaced with reusable cups or compostable corn starch cups. Get your thinking caps on and good luck!



For more information about the program please contact:

The Waste Wise Schools Program
Department of Water and Environmental Regulation
Locked bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983

Phone: (08) 6364 7000
Email: wastewise@dwer.wa.gov.au
Web: www.wastewise.wa.gov.au