

## Inquiry into the Response of Western Australian schools to climate change

Please note that I am contributing to this inquiry as an individual and not on behalf of my school.

I could apologise for the raw nature of my writing but the essence of what needs to happen now is about just taking everything from where it is and acting NOW.

Climate change is the greatest existential threat ever in human time but our Education Department has the power to save the world - literally  
...so do we have the courage to follow this through?

I am putting in this submission because of the following factors:

- a. Frustration - I have taught for forty years and have tried, since 1989, to contribute to school action on land care and healthy living.
- b. Definition of Insanity (doing the same thing...) - I have been in the same primary school for thirty-two years and have seen four grants, a state-wide environment award, six groups of parents and passionate teachers all work to this purpose. I have seen this in other schools too.
- c. Feeling like the little boy in the 'Emperor's New Clothes'- each time momentum has voluntarily built, it has fallen again due to exhaustion, lack of buy-in by administration and people leaving. Can't the department see this?
- d. Understanding - URGENCY TO ACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE.
- e. Need for Radical method - we can quickly mobilise actions to sustain programs across schools.
- f. Hope - that we can stop climatic damage by working IMMEDIATELY together, all as custodians of the land, all accepting that we have responsibility to land, led by our indigenous custodians.
- g. Willingness to help - I work only three days per week and am happy to voluntarily contribute to this planning. Please reach out to me. I have a wealth of knowledge.
- h. Please ensure that this inquiry does not drag on, but rather will begin actioning changes immediately.
- i. 'I' speaks for some others also but should be always 'WE'.

**MANDATE Schools must get to zero net by 2025.**

**JUST DO IT NOW.**

**Teachers are masters of making it work...stop expecting it to be voluntary- just a few to do the work. Pay someone to care for every school and mandate teaching of climate actions by every teacher.**

**It is easy to start with a short list of basic teaching for each year group.**

**Call the CLIMATE EMERGENCY and cut red tape which has slowed us to date.**

### **Co-benefits of climate action**

- People will engage to reduce waste and care for land when they have *learned how*.
- *Physical health* improves when healthy choices are made. Detrimental effects of poor water, food, air quality, carcinogenic packaging and many more crimes against the planet are well documented.
- Students and staff who are empowered to help negate climate change feel *mentally more connected* and become hopeful about the future.
- *Financial savings*: - Huge waste currently occurs - some examples:

- a. big multi- skip bins are replaced each week. This should be stopped and the bins only available once a term.
- b. Unwanted furniture should have to go to a recycling plant.
- c. Some food is not composted or sent to worm buckets.
- d. Garden cuttings go into the co-mingled skip. They should be composted.
- e. Paper waste is not recycled without a skip bin
- f. There is little incentive to save paper
- g. Power bills reduce with use of solar panels and a battery
- Community health is improved for all of the same reasons above because education trickles into the community eg: want a big compost area built up then ask a parent and pay them - it will be cheap, but it will get done with pride.  
Some of these benefits are recognised and promoted by some people. Each school should be expected to advertise their efforts. This is currently patchy.

### Current Climate change mitigation

Practices absolutely fit within Health, HAS and Science teaching. All these subject areas are, unfortunately already pressured to cover other topics. It would be more useful to mandate that every teacher must do something. This would ideally fit into a school plan.

Some climate change efforts have been initiated because they are clearly essential to sustainability practices, but teachings and actions are reliant on interested people volunteering time and this does not last.

Examples of some climate change efforts include:

- a. Growing food and seed native to nearby areas then replanting
- b. Caring for remnant bush.
- c. Planting native plants in school gardens. These don't require watering once established.
- d. Reducing waste by providing places for it to be recycled or reused - this only needs to be done where the waste is generated within the school. Families can dispose of their own waste where **councils provide bins.**
- e. Special Waste bins are provided for families who cannot get to bins for such items as batteries, plastic lids or pen recycle boxes elsewhere.
- f. Locally developed - Systems *don't cost much* where previous programs have been started or grants have provided hardware. Quite a few schools own neglected areas where action has been tried previously.
- g. Community partnerships - Parents will come to help when their own child is participating and at times which suit them. A coordinator is needed to sort this out.
- h. Recognise indigenous knowledge - There is some scattered learning through classrooms. Teach that we should all be custodians of the land.

### c. Barriers

- a. Complexity:-  
It is not complex. A simple list of goals can be built on each year. Provide actions which each school must achieve by mid 2022, then add more actions.
- b. Resources & Cost Many schools have the physical resources. The resources really needed are to *pay a teacher or qualified person*, say a full day, initially, to take on the coordination role. It would also help to pay an honorarium amount to a helper parent. Sustainability actions rely on motivated staff, but staff are already pressured to cover their own subject areas and roles (cleaners). Staff cannot maintain the consistency to sustain climate change programs. There is *no need to spend on physical resources* initially. Physical resources will be donated or makeshift (and cheap) once projects are going.
- c. Policies & regulations - It is absurd to leave sustainability as a 'cross-curricular' concept in this time of Climate Emergency. There should be a concerted push to put it front and centre for a few years

until carbon emissions are reduced, if indeed they can be reduced sufficiently to stop rising seas and the destruction of the oceans. Each person in the school should be asked to contribute by ticking a check-list of manageable goals eg; 'Our house/school does not dispose of rubbish in plastic bags. (This cannot be forced but social pressure and common sense would support this action). Examples: no packaging in lunch boxes; take home all rubbish or put it into the worm bins; use the back of papers; find ways of re-using and reducing paper use etc. Each school should also be able to check a list. Examples: ensure every object has a place and is not called WASTE - labelled bins; brick-makers; scrap paper pads; metal collection area; soft plastics bin; pens recycle box; battery box ALL ARE ALREADY HAPPENING IN SOME SCHOOLS.

d. *Reluctant attitudes* - are based on ignorance.

**Mandate this:** - immediate provision of *facts to families and classes:* - the warming process and how carbon rises to make the atmosphere trap heat; where carbon comes from and how to keep and return it to the ground; products and actions which reduce carbon emissions.

- This should be done immediately and followed up fortnightly at assemblies. This would also provide incentives for teachers and students to showcase what they have been doing.

### What to do to support schools

- *Build capacity* - We cannot accept climate change. Every effort should be made for Australia to demonstrate that we are fighting this crisis. Stop expecting people to work for nothing. Pay someone to achieve set actions in each school. One person may be able to service a couple of schools but would ideally be based in the school.
- *Schools making well-informed decisions* - Each school should be expected to achieve the basic list of goals and the basic information about why this is URGENT.
- *Schools outside of W.A.* are not needed. Teachers will reach out and research further as they go. We have enough happening in W.A. already...Publish and re-publish the list. Source appropriate people and match them to schools. Check up on them and replace them immediately if they are not achieving goals.

### Actions to consider:

- Water - native gardens - mandate new planting to gardeners.
- Energy - solar panels and batteries
- Plastics reduction - ban laminating; ban bin liners; collect soft plastics; put plastic bottles in dedicated bins (containers for change is ideal).
- Transport - educate about electric vehicles. Place electric vehicle charge points for staff (10 amp, as already available in schools is enough - just put a couple of regular power points in the car park and mark bays EV use)
- Healthy diet - is going well. Discourage rewards which build associations with sugary foods and instead provide vegetables with dips and extra break time.
- Biodiversity and green spaces -
  - stop nature play trampling plants. Put logs, sticks, dried grass and honkey nuts in a cage or area, opened each day for play. Teach care of nature.
  - Plant copses of native shrubs and native herbs (must be from local area) under trees. Stop mowers from ring-barking trees.
- Purchasing - pull back on such wasteful practises as re-branding and replacing furniture which is still functional.
  - Encourage and incentivise 'Bringing Your Own Device' and support children who cannot. Equality is not a valid argument here. All children will be provided with a device if needed but children who BYOD will be allowed to log in as a home guest to play their games. Children who 'borrow' a school device have all the same opportunities to do their homework but cannot use it for games.
- Waste - provide places for all school waste. Provide bins for parents who would otherwise put objects, such as batteries, into landfill.
- Built Environment - Do not allow any further bulldozing of bush areas.
- Problem-solving and critical thinking for solutions - ask open questions

- Ask children
- Ask parents
- Ask people, such as myself, who have worked on land-care
- Ask teachers, such as myself, who have taught programs.

We, the educated, should not be constantly fighting the government to get this done.

**We** should include the government- eg: The recent declaration on forests was necessary to save them. Now supporting the forest workers to live and move into new work can happen because of the declaration.

Well done and thank you!