



10 November 2021

Attention Catie Parsons

Submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee, Parliament of WA, Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change

West Coast Steiner School is a small independent, co-educational suburban primary school, situated in Nollamara 15 minutes north of Perth. Our school has 156 enrolled students from Kindergarten to Class 6 and approximately 40 children aged from 0-3 years who attend a playgroup session with a parent.

Our school welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and we have drawn upon the input of two staff members from Early Childhood and Primary who are members of our Sustainability Committee. They have divided the questions, firstly addressing points a. and d., then secondly points b. and c. Please note that there is also an appendix, detailing our sustainability plan from our current whole school strategic plan.

Our submission is supported by our School Principal, Ms Jenny Dougan.

If useful to your inquiry we invite the committee to visit our school, to see firsthand what we have put in place.

Kind Regards,

Vanessa Fountain and Holly Petersen  
Teachers West Coast Steiner School

Supported by Jenny Dougan  
Principal  
West Coast Steiner School



<p><b>a. The co-benefits of climate action in schools.</b></p>	<p>A) What are the co-benefits of climate action in schools for – and  B) Are these co-benefits recognised and promoted?  C) Is there an opportunity to cross-promote existing environmental and health activities being undertaken in schools as climate change action?</p>
<p><b>Student Learning:</b></p>	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection with the environment considered key to our curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Early Childhood imaginative stories of Mother Earth and Father Sun and all of nature’s creatures. The Undines (water beings – our waterways), the Sylph (air beings – atmosphere), the Gnomes (the earth – land care) and the Salamanders (fire beings – climate management) and humans working together to care for Mother Earth and the animals (Earth care)</li> <li>○ Class 1: Nature/1<sup>st</sup> Nation stories</li> <li>○ Class 2: Fables</li> <li>○ Class 3: Farming main lesson, House building main lesson</li> <li>○ Class 4: Man &amp; Animal main lesson</li> <li>○ Class 5: Botany main lesson</li> <li>○ Class 6: Gardening</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verses, songs, grace as acts of conscious gratitude for the Earth we live on, it’s bounty and our responsibility to care for it. Seasonal stories connect us to what is happening in the environment around us. eg Tiddalick, Twig – the Caterpillar, Mother Nature’s Helper etc.</li> <li>• Seasonal festivals punctuate the school and community calendar. Autumn festival, Winter festival, Spring Festival,</li> <li>• Seasonal foods are cooked in the kindergartens, playgroup and by classes. We have a commercial kitchen. Biodynamic and organic foods are purchased where available and financially viable.</li> <li>• Earth friendly cleaning products are specifically sourced.</li> <li>• Seasonal clothes swap stalls are held to encourage the reuse of clothing within the community</li> <li>• We are a waste wise school.</li> <li>• We have a waste recycling hub (see appendix 1).</li> </ul> <p>C)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certainly, in areas such as water harvest, bringing awareness to protecting this precious resource. Water tanks to supply water play and gardens. When it is gone, it is gone.</li> <li>• Planting water wise and diverse gardens. Planning, developing, and maintaining gardens using Permaculture and Biodynamic principles of land and people care.</li> <li>• Creating play and workspaces that consider water capture, solar orientation, fire risk mitigation, zones of proximity for use of the land.</li> <li>• Promoting sustainable animal husbandry in the school. Example: Chickens, eating school morning tea and lunch scraps. Deep litter bedding breaks down with the chicken manure and green waste to become quality soil improver for the school gardens. Eggs could be used in a future canteen or be available for community use.</li> <li>• Plastic free lunch boxes and school accoutrement used by the school community.</li> <li>• Environmentally conscious purchasing throughout the school.</li> </ul>
<p>Student and staff mental and physical health:</p>	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have relandscaped the grounds to be completely nature based. Many trees both native and productive trees have been planted. Bush tucker garden established. Areas of pure aesthetic with a water wise foundation are established. We have a water feature with water plants to create a calm space. This doubles as a water source for the birds, insects, and frogs.</li> </ul> <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are but we could certainly have more spaces of beauty to service both the inner calm of the staff and students and the needs of the wildlife.</li> </ul> <p>C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beautiful, shady, productive land that allows for winter sun and summer shade. Water installations that allow wildlife to thrive and calm the soul of the humans. Working in a beautiful calm environment.</li> <li>• Productive gardens that give real life skills for producing for the individual and the community give a sense of resiliency and self-efficacy.</li> <li>• To be building in staff and students the capacity to meet changes and pioneer new initiatives in a rapidly changing world. How do we create community, manage the land, animal husbandry and meet our needs in an urban environment? Permaculture principles.</li> <li>• Build in elements of Commit, Connect and Belong into our site and community management. Interface with the broader community – community gardening on the verge</li> </ul>

	<p>of the Government owed school oval. Invite aged care facilities to become involved in the community gardens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold workshops that are open to the broader community on water wise principles, water capture and use, composting, worm farms, growing our own food, etc.</li> <li>• Working on and around the site brings physical activity without making it competitive or individualised.</li> </ul>
<p>Financial savings in the education system:</p>	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solar panel system saving on electricity and mitigating the need for air conditioner use in the height of summer.</li> <li>• Growing our own food, such as pumpkins in the Kindy Garden to make into pumpkin soup in the winter months morning tea.</li> </ul> <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, we celebrate the food that we have grown, particularly in Kindergarten and Class 3. The produce is cooked or used by the classes that have grown it and any excess is offered to community.</li> </ul> <p>C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring gardening into the day to day of all the classes. This involves planning for the site, for the conditions, working out how to capitalise on abundances and how to mitigate or transform challenges in the site.</li> <li>• Gradually change the culture from being entertained/entitled/consumeristic to an awareness of personal responsibility and contribution to the wellbeing of the place and the other.</li> </ul>
<p>The community:</p>	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can bring change/innovation home to their families and create a ripple effect in the community. Example: The recycling hub and waste management strategies utilised at the school.</li> <li>• Students learn to garden and care for the Earth and take these skills home.</li> </ul> <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not as well as they could be. We could hold assemblies where our students speak to the benefits to the individual, the community, and the Earth in the activities they are undertaking.</li> </ul> <p>C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent rosters for moving the Permaculture initiative forward at a greater pace.</li> <li>• Holding weekend workshops. Inviting leaders in key areas to bring interest and expertise to issues of climate change and what we can do about it now.</li> </ul>

<b>d. What more can be done to support schools to respond to climate change?</b>	
How can capacity be built within schools to prepare for and respond to climate change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandate passive solar buildings, sustainable materials, local services, and materials where possible, grey water systems (natural pond filtration where suitable), solar capture, wind turbines, composting toilets, green cleaning solutions, waste retention and recycling on site, kitchen gardens</li> <li>• Schools as community hubs, encouraging bike riding (cycle paths), walking buses and catchment specific buses.</li> <li>• Provide scholarships, prizes, and opportunities for schools to become centres of excellence in given areas - providing professional development opportunities to other schools for teachers and students.</li> </ul>
How can schools be equipped to make well informed decisions about undertaking climate action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring in a curriculum such as Safe Schools (K – 12) that covers the latest in climate action, sustainable practices that not only heal the planet but meet the needs of mind body and soul of the humans that inhabit the Earth.</li> <li>• Link funding to climate action imperatives.</li> </ul>

Second part of the submission addressing questions b. and c.

b. Climate change mitigation and adaption actions currently being undertaken in schools, and the benefits they are achieving.

### **Waste Management**

WCSS has a sustainability committee who have most recently been focused on improving the schools waste management. We are an accredited 'Waste Wise School' and we have had waste wise incursions and excursions, with representatives from class 3-6 attending a tour of a local recycling centre. (see attachment, **Appendix 1**, Sustainability Project from the Strategic Plan, 2021 - 2022)

Each classroom has its own waste sorting bins including recycling, paper, compost and soft plastics. The school is also involved in Terracycle, and we encourage community members to bring their recyclable item into school to sort into the appropriate Terracycle bins. These considerations have led to a reduction in waste leaving our school to end up in landfill.

Education of staff and students has been a priority with a fortnightly 'caring for our earth' focus in place, communicated through newsletters and assemblies. Focuses have included composting, soft plastics and waste free lunch boxes. This has spread awareness of the benefits of reducing our waste and carbon footprint. The aim is to draw attention to initiatives and practical solutions and ideas that families can incorporate into their routines.

For example, families are encouraged to pack a waste free lunch box; we emphasise this through participating in waste free Wednesday's.

### **School Materials**

The school's ethos holds our natural world in high regard, we use high quality, natural materials wherever possible and from a young age the students make many of their own school items including pencil cases, recorder bags, beanies, and scarfs. This fosters an appreciation for and connection to the resources and work that goes into creating garments and the students cherish and care for their handmade items for many years. This slower approach to gathering useful, practical, and beautiful items is a step away from mass production. Our daily verses, songs and routines involve gratitude for our earth and a express a need to protect and love it.

### **Gardens**

It is important to us that our school has an abundance of healthy trees and that our gardens are water wise. We teach outdoors often, so natural shade is greatly valued and as such our trees are well cared for.

WCSS is striving to improve its ground's biodiversity through planting a range of native and edible plants and bee attracting flowers. Each year the class 3's plant and care for an edible garden. Our Class 6's most recent project was to create a permaculture bee sanctuary at the entrance of our school. We have also recently planted a Bush Tucker garden with the help of 'Tucker Bush Schools', part of this project was an incursion led by a First Nations woman who shared her knowledge of the edible plants.

### **Curriculum**

Across the curriculum our natural world is celebrated and held in reverence, fostering a sense of wonder, respect and responsibility in our students. For example; In Class 1 the students hear nature stories and local stories from The Dreaming. In Class 3 the students study farming and gardening, touching on biodynamic and permaculture practices. In Class 4 the children explore animal's habitats and their needs during the Man and Animal Main Lesson and in Class 5 the students enter a Botany Main Lesson. Awareness of and connection to the natural world leads the students to see themselves as guardians of our school grounds and hopefully of their own natural surrounds as they go forth into the world.

### **C. Barriers that schools encounter in undertaking climate action and how these can be addressed.**

- **Cost – Infrastructure, such as capacity to capture and store water. To maintain gardens and reduce costs and shade structures. As our planet warms, providing suitable sun safe areas for children to play and learn outside the classroom is vital.**  
Upkeep of the grounds - maintaining and developing existing garden beds, watering, mulching, tree pruning, establishing vegetable garden beds, fertilising, pest and weed control. Gardener's salary – we cannot afford to employ a full-time person.  
How this could be addressed: Grants could be applied for, fundraisers could be organised, however, these options require significant time and community input.

- Knowledge / expertise – We would ideally like to seek guidance and consult experts before commencing projects to ensure that they are established effectively.  
How this could be addressed: We could potentially put callouts to the community to utilise the skills and knowledge held within the school and surrounding areas. Tap into local government initiatives.
- Time – Long term school plans needs to be clear before sustainability projects can be approved. The school has a capital works plan that is currently being carried out.  
How this could be addressed: Climate action plans could be incorporated into future planning documents.

Education and time – whilst most of the students and community want to do the right thing and support sustainable actions, we can often fall short, it requires continual commitment to the cause. Largely, because the process of recycling and sorting is time consuming.

How this could be addressed: A designated staff member to oversee the process, from assemblies to waste management. We could not afford to employ such a person at present.