

## **Student Leadership in Sustainability**

Beaumaris Primary School

ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic Core Module

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### INTRODUCTION

Beaumaris Primary School is set in a quiet residential area close to beaches, sporting facilities, shopping villages and public transport. Our school has a backdrop of beautiful gums, a well maintained oval and gardens of natives and plants indigenous to the area, enjoyed by 536 students and their families, 2 Principal class and 43 Staff.

A strength of our school is the value placed on community by students, staff, families and local residents and the level of active parent involvement. Our shared purpose is 'Learning Together'. We believe in and are committed to providing quality learning experiences that offer our students both support and challenge to enable them to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that are transferrable and adaptable to whatever their future holds. To achieve this, we have a shared understanding of effective learning and teaching and our school values of respect, resilience, responsibility and relationships underpin a culture of inclusivity, connectedness and sense of belonging within the school. We blend strong, everlasting traditions and beliefs with innovative and contemporary practice. We work collaboratively with our local network schools and host tours by local, state and interstate colleagues to share our professional knowledge, practice and resources.

Our Sustainability Vision is to actively engage students, staff and the community in developing a sustainable environment which fosters and inspires best practice and emphasises the importance of preparing and empowering individuals to become responsible for contributing to a sustainable future.

During 2011, Beaumaris Primary School decided to focus further on the environment and sustainability from 2012 and beyond and commence our journey to become accredited as a sustainable school. We applied for and received a grant from our local Bendigo Bank branch which facilitated a partnership with Port Phillip Eco Centre to assist the school to progress through the Modules of the ResourceSmart AuSSi Vic Framework for accreditation. A facilitator, Andrea Eales, is currently leading teachers through Professional Development to audit what sustainable practices are already in place and develop a plan based around the Core AuSSiVic module then the four further modules of Waste, Water, Biodiversity and Energy.

This 'place based' model brings together a consortium of local service providers in our region who support our school through the ResourceSmart AuSSI Vic journey so we can:

- minimise waste, save energy and water, promote biodiversity, and cut greenhouse gas emissions
- integrate educational, environmental, social and economic outcomes and embed sustainability into the fabric of everyday school and community life.

Our facilitator is assisting us to develop a whole school approach which includes staff, students, parents and members of our wider community to facilitate a more sustainable approach to how we live and interact with our environment and to reduce the impact we have upon it. Our broad focus is Education for Sustainability, which includes operations, building relationships within the community, curriculum and school grounds, and to complete the appropriate components of each Module.

We are currently collating and entering the information to maintain up to date SETS data which can then be used to measure any differences we have made through our initiatives.

## CHALLENGES

In terms of student leadership we set out to establish a team of leaders with a sustainability focus. Initially we appointed two Sustainability Captains with general responsibility across all areas including waste, recycling and kitchen garden. One of our early challenges was to have the students highly motivated to work at improving our practices in these areas. They were keen on the titles, but initially weren't so keen to get down and dirty!

## ACTIONS & ACHIEVEMENTS

In order to train up and motivate the students we tapped into as many sources as possible which provided workshops, training and conferences for students to attend to build their skills and increase their motivation.

Through our connections with Cool Australia we registered for Enviroweek in 2010 and encouraged students and their families to participate by taking on a personal challenge to increase awareness of the need to care for our environment and raise money at the same time. We were the equal top fundraiser with one other school and won a major prize, which was an exciting start to our journey.

In 2011 we began working with our year 4 & 5 students as well as year 6s, believing a succession plan was very important and hoping that enthusiasm would build among this cohort to ensure a highly motivated leadership team in the coming years. It worked.

The students were supported by the principal and several staff and parents to attend a variety of learning experiences including-

- VAE run student workshops and forums
- Big Green Schools Conferences (Kingston Council & Carrum PS)
- Kids Teaching Kids Conferences
- Workshops at Port Phillip EcoCentre
- *I sea, I care* programs @ Dolphin Research Institute

- Sustainability Fair (Bentleigh Secondary College)
- Visy Project R & Banyule Rethink Education Centre visits
- Sustainability Awards & Harvest Festivals (Port Phillip Ecocentre)
- Student Leadership Conference
- Joost's Greenhouse Café
- Red Project (soft plastic recycling) school-based visits
- "Meet The Joneses" Sustainability exhibit
- Cool Australia planting days at Gosch's Paddock & West Gate Park
- "Creating Wildlife Passages" conference @ Bentleigh West PS
- Cool Australia Enviroweek Launch

Year 4 students in 2011 also ran their own Kids Teaching Kids Conference for prep, year 1 & 2 students as part of Australia Post's Kid Teaching Kids Week, gaining funding, planning an opening ceremony with Jason Kimberley from Cool Australia as special guest and running workshops over the morning. Our current Sustainability Captains had this wide range of experiences in years 4 & 5 and continue to perform to an outstanding level in their roles. Late in 2012 as these students nominated themselves for 2013 leadership roles we decided to create a Kitchen Garden Captain position in addition to the existing Sustainability Captains, due to the number of students so highly motivated in this area.

In addition to the increased commitment of the leaders, there has been a significant increase in the number of students participating in the two teams, with self-appointed, unofficial "deputies" supporting their leaders and providing guidance for the many students who like to help out in the garden in particular.

At the same time we began our journey to become a Kathy Walker Learning school, which involved incorporating Sustainability based learning intentions at all levels from foundation to 6 in our curriculum planning. This enabled us to develop the skills of embedding sustainability in our curriculum as opposed to teaching it as a stand along "topic". In any classroom you visit now you will see work products showcasing student learning about sustainability and the links between their personal interests and the sustainability based learning intentions. The students proudly share their ideas and artefacts between classes from all levels.

The major achievement through all of this has been the development of an active, committed team who work diligently on sustainability based projects throughout the school. In addition to this, students in younger year levels now aspire to these leadership roles and work towards not only improving our sustainability practices but also building their own skills to lead and support others. The commitment across the school is evidenced in our reduced landfill, increased recycling of comingled waste, thriving worm farms and chickens fed by our composting system, reduction of soft plastic waste via the Red Project and greatly increased nude food lunchboxes among students and staff.

We celebrate our achievements on a weekly basis at assembly, in staff meetings and briefings and with annual awards presented to students at year 6 Graduation. We also regularly acknowledge our efforts and achievements in our weekly newsletter which is sent to families via email.

## REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

The top three things I have learnt are-

- A succession plan is vital, ensuring students are given opportunities and experiences over at least two to three years to develop their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm as well as their ability to work as part of a team, in order to participate and provide leadership in our many sustainability initiatives.
- Ongoing financial commitment from the school is essential to facilitate participation in the available conferences, workshops and training sessions as well as other relevant sustainability-based excursions and school-based visits which provide invaluable learning and motivation for both staff and students.
- Creating behavioural change is hugely challenging and creating a “buzz” rather than trying to constantly railroad/enforce change will foster greater success. In particular, enabling the students to generate and drive the change where possible empowers them as leaders and role models when they feel their ownership and management of the issues and processes is highly valued.

We now need to decide whether to focus on Biodiversity or Waste during the remainder of this year and term 1, 2014. As we have already worked on both of these areas over the last two years we are contemplating attempting to do both for accreditation in April 2014. Our first priority is to use funds raised from a free dress day and our upcoming fete in October to purchase a water tank to harvest water from our new sports shed. This will provide water for our newly planted indigenous garden which was established as part of the Creating Wildlife Passages project we participated in with Bentleigh West PS, which was funded by the Department of Sustainability and won a United Nations World Environment Day award in June.

We will also investigate the possibility of applying again to Bendigo Bank for another of their annual grants to assist us to complete the next two modules of the AuSSiVic Resource Smart program.

For further information about this project, I can be contacted by email at [mcmanus.lindy.m@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:mcmanus.lindy.m@edumail.vic.gov.au).



Sustainability Captains Megan Tedstone and Daniel Lu with Kitchen Garden Captain Charlie Munn (left) and some of our hardworking kitchen garden team, Beth Tedstone, Georgia Shephard and Zac Pandur, supporting Megan in the kitchen garden



Our very dedicated waste/recycling team July 26, 2013