



Farrer Primary School

Sustainable school grounds and gardens

Background

Farrer Primary School has around 360 students. In 2000, the school established an environment centre with chickens, worm farms, a pond, large water tank, garden beds and a classroom. Building the centre was entirely funded by parent and school funds.



The Environment Centre

A part-time teacher is employed to run the Environment Centre and teach science to all year levels. Students visit once a week while their teachers take release time. The centre is also open at lunch times for students to explore the gardens and care for the animals.

A student environment club conducts specific tasks to help maintain the centre. Some activities associated with the centre include:

- preschool to year 6 collecting organics to feed to the worm farm and chickens
- planting a carbon-absorbing forest for shade, learning environments and playtime
- families taking on responsibilities over the holidays such as feeding the chickens and watering the gardens

- the school canteen using produce grown in the garden and collecting organic waste
- selling produce, seeds and plants at school fetes and market days to raise money for sustainability initiatives
- using the centre for functions such as teacher workshops and community information evenings.

Student Engagement

Student leadership is a priority and the students act as hosts to other student groups from nearby schools. Students feel empowered when included in the maintenance and running of outdoor areas and skills are transferred to their homes.

Students enjoy raking large piles of autumn leaves and assisting the Building Services Officer (BSO) to turn them into mulch and packaging them to sell to the community or at Bunnings.

Rosters and rules are clearly displayed in the centre so student environment club members understand their roles.





At the Environment Centre students learn about:

- recycling organic waste
- feeding and maintaining chickens and worm farms
- plant selection and growing produce
- plant propagation
- caring for animals
- working cooperatively with other students
- the importance of reducing their ecological footprint
- their impact on the environment both locally and globally.

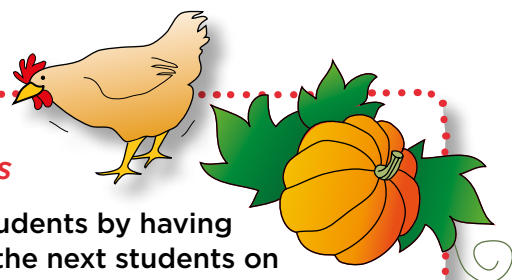
Curriculum Links

The Environment Centre is used for learning outcomes across the school curriculum. Teachers can bring their classes to the centre to carry out assessment activities including:

- soil testing — experimenting with crop rotation and creating potting mixes
- solar experiments — observing colour and growth in various areas of the garden, and using student-made terrariums
- plant growth — experiments to see how different mixtures affect plant growth.

Challenges

- Gaining the support of parents and teaching staff to create a release role for an environment teacher.
- Liaising with other schools to help compile the relevant documentation to address issues such as occupational health and safety.
- Ensuring ongoing support and utilisation of the centre whenever there is a leadership and staff change.



Tips and Hints

- **Empower students by having them teach the next students on the roster about feeding the chickens and maintaining the worm farm.**
- **A supportive BSO will help with large manual tasks.**
- **Employ the free services of Conservation Volunteers to help with large jobs such as weeding, pruning, fencing and planting out garden beds.**
- **Parents and grandparents are willing and able volunteers in your outdoor spaces. Ask for volunteers in the school newsletter and reward them with fresh produce grown in the garden!**



Watch this story as a video: search 'Actsmart Schools' on www.youtube.com