Open Hearts, Open Minds

Star of the Sea School

Our context

Star of the Sea School, Henley Beach, is unique for its close proximity to the seashore, located just metres away. It is therefore the host school to the Marine Discovery Centre. The school and Marine Discovery Centre share the same goal of raising awareness of our marine environments, promoting conservation and sustainability. The 510 Reception to Year 7 students are all involved in marine education and sharing their knowledge and experiences with the community.

Our vision and values for a more sustainable world

The Star of the Sea School’s vision: “In partnership with our community and within the Catholic tradition provides students with an excellent foundation for lifelong learning and the inspiration to take an active part in shaping a better world for all.”

The School’s Core Values include: Respect (acceptance) Inclusivity (friendship), Collaboration (team work), Honesty (trust), and Compassion (love/kindness).

The Star of the Sea community values and believes that all people should have access to and be encouraged to care for and restore the health of the planet. We all have a special responsibility as stewards of our Earth to engage in sustainable practices.

The school motto “Open Hearts, Open Minds” is the focus for whatever they think about doing.

Leadership at the school are very supportive of integrating sustainability as much as possible, and has included sustainability in the Annual Improvement Plan as one of the key pillars. As well as this, Peter Hoskin, Science Coordinator, has been appointed Position of Responsibility in sustainability which gives him two days a term to focus on sustainability matters.

Our sustainability initiatives

The school has a particular focus on the marine environment and the affect that land management has on the health of the oceans, its creatures and plants. Reducing the effect of land and sea pollution is a priority. They are continuing to restore the school environment to a healthier and more natural environment, reducing their carbon footprint and re-connecting their students to the natural environment. This is done through their many learning environments around the school.

Each year level has a sustainability focus, they are responsible for maintaining throughout the year. Reception-Year 1s focus on Nude Food, Year 2s are looking at litter in the school environment, Year 3s participate in dune planting and are the energy monitors of the school, Year 4s and 5s share the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, Year 6s are managing the recycling of the 10c containers, culminating with the Year 7 Ecowarriors who are the leaders of the school and manage organics by collecting food scraps from classrooms and recycling them in the worm farms and composting.

One representative from each year level is a member of the WOW working group. Each year the representative member change to another staff member, giving more people the opportunity to be involved and exposed to the process, and give them ownership to shape the sustainability initiatives of the school. An NRM Education officer is also present at each of these meetings to support the process and help tie in each year levels efforts into the overarching vision for the school.

This year the whole community is involved with developing a new Nature Play and Natural Learning Space to reflect their respect for engaging with the environment and their broader focus of learning about the environment, in the environment. It is expected to be another space in the school for teachers to enhance learning, values and skills.

The Marine Discovery Centre promotes caring for our land and beach environment.
Curriculum Connections

Star of the Sea School implements a contemporary primary school curriculum, which is strongly influenced by a healthy environmental beach lifestyle. They have a real environmental consciousness as they teach their children to respect their environment. They have recycling programs, education in worm farming and composting. Gardens on the school grounds consist of local native species and an organic vegetable garden which is support by the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.

Every classroom has the three bin system which is monitored and emptied by students.

Staff attend regular training and networking, such as the Nature Play Conference in March, to increase their knowledge, skills and gather ideas to integrate sustainability into the classroom.

The Marine Discovery Centre, located on site, has been operating for 18 years now. They have recently employed a marine biologist to work with the school’s students and visiting students, showing the continual growth and importance of the centre.

Meeting challenges

Challenges that this school faces are similar to many others - time to plan with teachers. This makes documentation of all the wonderful projects and learning difficult to obtain from teachers, to be able to share across the school and with future years. This is something the school is working on as recording what is happening is of importance so that experiences and resources are shared among staff.

Communication and participation

Participation by all is important to the school community, and reflected in the schools’ working group which has a year level representative who then communicates with the rest of the year level staff. A SEMP is also used to record achievements and action plans for the school as a whole, and each year level with their individual sustainability focus.

To communicate sustainability educational opportunities at the school with families, they are having an open evening for families to tour their gardens and recycling areas, and other learning areas. Attendees will be given passports to visit different stations around the school to become familiar with all their sustainability areas and special teaching areas.

Connecting with community

Star of the Sea school is involved with the Scientists and Mathematicians in Schools (SMiS) program, which involves engaging in sessions with a scientists conducting surveys and research into food chains and plankton. The school also contributed to the SMiS open day, sharing their story of connecting with and learning from scientists in the community.

Annual sand dune planting is undertaken each year with the local council.

One of the many outdoor learning spaces giving students hands on educational and sustainability opportunities.
Assemblies regularly communicate successes and plans to a wide audience. The results from the school’s Nude Food day were presented at the assembly and made available online for the community. All classes had calculated their figures for packaging before and on the school wide Nude Food day. They are planning to have 2 Nude Food days per term to continue encouraging and educating families. The active communication and participation throughout the school community means that there are a lot of people involved, and there’s a real shared responsibility with lots of people taking action.

NRM Education support
The Core Indicators are used in collaboration with the School Environment Management Plan (SEMP), as a guiding tool to link their Education for Sustainability approach with their on ground initiatives. Goals have been achieved, and new goals set for the year, showing their progress towards a transforming school community.

Outcomes
Through their efforts the school is working to embed Education for Sustainability reflected in their SEMP and their progress through the core indicators. The students are involved in hands on learning, contributing to the school’s sustainability, staff share their learning and resources to improve their own skills and knowledge. The school community is consulted and included in decision making and shaping the sustainable future of the school.

Next steps
The focus for year will be to continue developing the new Nature Play and Natural Learning Space and embedding this into curriculum and the school culture.

The planning and development of a new Natural Learning Space has involved the whole community.