

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Dear Education and Health Standing Committee,

Re: ECU School of Education Submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry

I am writing to you on behalf of the School of Education, Edith Cowan University, a submission to the inquiry into the response of *Western Australia Schools Response to Climate Change*.

a) The co-benefits of climate action in schools

Children learn about climate change long before they commence formal schooling. Children learn about climate change from those around them including their immediate family and where applicable, early learning centres. In a child's early years and attending an approved early learning centre, the National Quality Standard specifically states a focus on sustainability which is included in *Element 3.2.3: Environmentally Responsible* – the early learning service provides evidence of caring for the environment and supporting children to become environmentally responsible. In the F-10 Australian Curriculum, sustainability is one of the cross-curriculum priorities. Through the priority of sustainability, students develop the knowledge, skills, values, and world views necessary to contribute to a more sustainable pattern of living.

The emphasis in contemporary schooling is on children becoming 'stewards of the earth'. Even from the early years the concepts of being sustainable and 'saving the world for later' can be understood and this is important in supporting children to become environmentally responsible citizens. A sustainable early learning centre/service or school will not only include environmental education within their curriculum and learning programs but will also role model sustainable practices within their daily operations. This may include developing sustainable policies around energy usage, water consumption, food waste and engagement with the local community. We know from past large scale national campaigns such as "smoking is dangerous" that, in many cases, parents ceased smoking in response to their children's 'nagging' and quoting of what they learned at school about the hazards and risks of smoking. We consider this is already happening with regards to climate change; hence educating children about climate change in school could have a co-benefit of motivating the parent generation towards change. If these parents are in a position of influence in society then the benefits could be far greater.

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

Sustainability and environmentally responsible practices are part of the curriculum, including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) *Outcome 2: Children are connected and contribute to their world*. In this outcome children are learning to become socially responsible and show respect for the environment. Additionally, the WA curriculum for Science the focus is on biological sciences, chemical sciences, earth and space sciences and physical sciences. Each of these areas has important content linking to sustainable practices and care for the environment. The *Design and Technologies* curriculum has an emphasis on food and fibre production and materials and technologies. *The Health and Physical Education* curriculum includes attitudes and values for a healthy lifestyle, personal responsibility for choices and behaviours and contributing to healthy communities.

Examples of the ways this is implemented include –

1. Reading storybooks with environmental themes to start a conversation about the importance of living sustainably

2. Spending time in nature – bushwalks, birdwatching, observing animals, outdoor play environments.
3. Starting a veggie garden, planting seeds and learning about the process of growth and development and the concept of *farm to plate* or *farm to fork*. This can open up many conversations around food production and climate change.
4. Embedding the concept of '*reduce, re-use and recycle*' in everyday practice for both children and educators to build enduring and positive attitudes towards environmentally responsible practices.
5. Role modelling energy and water conservation practices: For example, turning off lights and air-conditioning when a room is not in use, emptying water play containers onto garden areas.
6. Making recycling part of everyday practice.
7. Using worm farms and/or compost bins to reduce food waste. Children being encouraged to place food scraps into separate containers for use in a worm farm or composting bin. Educators can and do provide visual guides and discuss with children and families which scraps worms can eat, which foods can be composted, and which food scraps must go in a separate waste container. Children can and are involved in maintaining a worm farm and compost bin.
8. Using 'green cleaning' products to replace the use of environmentally damaging chemicals where possible.
9. Including sustainability and environmentally responsible practices as part of the curriculum, and in discussions with children and families.
10. Being a part of community projects such as tree planting, clean up days, world earth day.
11. Providing information to families on environmentally responsible practices that are implemented at the school or service and encouraging these practices at home.

Sustainable Schools WA is a whole-school planning framework for Education for Sustainability (EfS) that has been developed 'by schools, for schools' to support implementation of the Western Australian Curriculum. The *Sustainable Schools WA Toolkit* contains a range of resources to support schools to develop whole of school 'sustainability action plans' relevant to their own, local context. *The Sustainable Schools WA Toolkit* contains a range of resources to support schools to develop a whole of school 'sustainability action plans' relevant to their own, local context. Climate change is one of the most significant challenges that this and future generations will need to address. Taking action through *Sustainable Schools WA* plays an important part in informing and educating the future generations about this challenge.

- The following initiative, [Living Green Program](#), by the City of Stirling involves communities including school participation.
- Community participation in relation to climate is critical and STEM education can provide many co-benefits as highlighted in the journal article [Community Involvement in STEM Education](#), (Mildenhall).

c) Barriers that schools encounter in undertaking climate action and how these can be addressed

The education curriculum from Birth – high school has so many elements to encourage sustainability and climate action that already in place. There are ample resources available to educators and teachers from the Department of Education, reputable websites and publications. One of the barrier, however, is the attitude of the educators and teachers in regard to adopting sustainable practices and their own personal belief system about climate change.

Potential development of holistic, multi-discipline approaches to climate action can be hindered in secondary schools by learning area driven curriculum priorities and timetabling.

Like other cross-curricular issues, climate action may well be seen as everyone's and no-one's responsibility and may lack dedicated resourcing and investment of teaching and learning time. If additional and specifically targeted funding was made available to schools and in particular public goal setting of "green schools" there would be the tangible evidence of not only educational practice in the curriculum but also how the community could see sustainability in action with schools. Whilst many schools do have many aspects in place such as PV cells on roofs and rainwater capture and use on green spaces and tree plantings in and around school grounds.

d) What more can be done to support schools to respond to climate change There are a range of supports that could be undertaken to support schools and be leaders in the communities for tangible positive approaches to climate change. Adopting a whole school approach – see attachment from Coolbinia School is one example. Additionally, the following could be considered:

- More community projects for children and schools to be involved in which could include adopting a specific tree planting scheme or stewardship of an area to regrow, replant and manage
- Professional learning opportunities for educators and teachers.
- Funding opportunities and grants for schools to adopt more projects including specific funding to schools to minimise their carbon footprint.
- Coordinated initiative for professional learning to develop capacity amongst future and current staff – involving ITE institutions, professional associations and systems/sectors working together.
- Steps can be taken today regarding financial savings – school systems and sectors simply need to assess cost saving measures that are also environmentally sound. For schools located in remote communities there could be an expanded opportunity to harness solar energy or wind energy and convert to stored energy to use in the school and within the community such as power for teacher housing, community hall.

In conclusion there are many opportunities to support schools to positively respond to climate change and reduce barriers to undertake climate action.

There has been a great deal of positive work undertaken. It requires further commitment to utilise and harness that momentum to provide positive action regarding climate change.

Yours faithfully

Professor Stephen Winn
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