

# Whitebridge High School



SEMP

Case

Study

“Turning an Eyesore  
..... into an Asset”

Year 7 Service Learning Community Project



High School

Whitebridge

Whitebridge High School is a co-educational, comprehensive high school with an enrolment of 1000

students. The school has well established buildings, extensive grounds and a predominantly bushland setting on the edge of Glenrock Reserve.

As a community high school it has worked to establish close links with its primary feeder schools and prides itself on its commitment to student wellbeing and academic achievement.

It is from the school's community development initiatives that this environmental project arose and extended into the development of a full School Environmental Management Plan (SEMP).

In particular the wetland project supports other school infrastructure enhancements to create overall student awareness about water usage, solar power generation and recycling to minimise the school's total carbon footprint and to enhance sustainability.



## Introduction and Background

This is a project that began small and has steadily grown into something that has gained impetus and enthusiasm - a life of it's own, in fact it has grown so large, so quickly that the teachers involved state that it's "a bit overwhelming", in a very positive way.

The two classes of Year 7 students were looking for a community support project as part of their curriculum requirements and had a desire to make the world a prettier place. The school is lucky to have teachers who were sensitive to the environment and sustainability issues and so together they grew a wetland project.

Two disused long jump pits in a depression in the playground were targeted as an area that could have an improved amenity; it was considered an ugliness and patch that collected rubbish, runoff and weed growth.

In 2007 there was no School Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) but one has grown out of this small start.



# Aims

The major aims of the project fall under the umbrella of one of the schools strategic priorities in its Management plan:

To build and develop leadership through collaborative school community management:

... And to build an enhanced community perception of the school, by developing partnerships and positive relationships.

# Across Curriculum

The wetland has been developed and utilised by students through environmental perspectives in their learning, including motivation for the writing of sensory poems, art where works have been completed and will be mounted in the area around the frog pond.

Science classes do dipnetting and water quality testing as well as constructing mini wetlands in the classroom. The Evenstart program for Aboriginal students assisted with initial work and assisted in developing their maths concepts. All this has boosted students' awareness of environmental issues and awareness of the Aboriginal heritage of the local area.

# Challenges and Benefits

Holiday vandalism and play involving constructions through the wetland to the small island has increased maintenance of the area but the overall benefits far outweigh this.

Increased beauty and biodiversity of the school grounds, habitat protection and the immense pride that ongoing year 7 students place in this area is inspiring and their wish to share this with incoming students from feeder primary schools. This area is also used as a peaceful place by students, particularly girls and is seen as a calm haven.

# Funding and Support

Year 7 and 10 Service Learning students  
Lake Macquarie Environmental Grants  
School Budget  
Lake Macquarie Landcare for 600 plants and large amounts of mulch  
Ex students and teachers for donation of time and machinery  
Parent body for skills and labour  
Local businesses for graphic design and signage



Partnerships with: Bunnings Glendale for equipment and material and Kotara for cost price purchases; G & C Starkey Earthmoving for assistance with the geofabric lining; and Trees in Newcastle for the supply of native aquatic plants that have been established.

# Future Plans

Applications for future water and sustainability grants to install water tanks to collect water from the hall to feed into the wetlands. Further water harvesting and storage for herb and permaculture gardens and for school wide installation of water saving taps, small flush toilets and dripless bubblers are planned.

Also an outdoor learning pavilion, a solar powered water aeration and reticulation project for the wetland; in fact, whole school sustainability with utilities, biodiversity recycling and reuse, including a healthy canteen are planned through the auspices of the school environmental team.

# Acknowledgments

Principal: Ian Wilson

Environmental Coordinators: Helen Aitchison and Karyn Harman

Ex Staff: Kate Bestwick

Students

Parents

