

## Talking trash

Getting primary school students enthused about reducing school waste is proving an effective form of environmental education.

by **Cynthia Karena**

### Briefly

- Grays Point Public School has been able to reduce its landfill contribution by 60 per cent.
- Solar panels at Ardross Primary School have reduced its power bills by 20 per cent.
- Australind Senior High School feeds green waste from its canteen to the school's chooks.

**W**hat happens to a plastic bag when it is carelessly thrown away? This was the starting point for Grays Point Public School teacher Kay Moriarty to develop a simple PowerPoint presentation about the life of a plastic bag and the impact it can have on the marine environment.

When the story was presented at the primary school's assembly, it was especially relevant—Grays Point is on the Hacking River, which feeds into Port Hacking estuary, south of Sydney—and staff and students were inspired to adopt a range of waste reduction activities.

Many local councils and environmental organisations offer resources and help in reducing waste. Moriarty, a special reading teacher who is also her school's environmental coordinator, was

herself inspired by a free local council earthworks course which included a visit to the tip to see what could be recycled rather than put into landfill.

When the school's canteen introduced plastic cups, the amount of litter in the playground increased. Moriarty introduced co-mingling recycle bins and food scrap compost bins, then contacted companies such as Visy to help with the removal of recyclable waste.

The school is also a part of the Mobile Muster program which collects mobile phones so their parts can be recycled.

Drink cans are another target. In Moriarty's Canteen Cash for Cans program, students exchange their cans for credit at the school canteen. A bin the school put at the next door soccer club keeps even more cans out of landfill. Any extra money from can recycling goes towards environmental projects at the school. *(continues over)*





**Kay Moriarty's *Canteen Cash for Cans* program encourages students to exchange their cans for credit at the school canteen.**



ROMAN MILERT / ISTOCKPHOTO



## Net gains

Internet technology is being used in various ways to help schools become more environmentally aware and reduce waste.

The new Queensland-oriented Sustainable Schools website ([www.sustainableschools.qld.edu.au](http://www.sustainableschools.qld.edu.au)) has online tools and resources to help schools research, plan, monitor and manage their impact on the environment.

The site's 12-step sustainability plan asks schools to reflect on their environmental vision, goals and the issues they want to address. A data collection tool generates graphs of progress which allow principals and students to monitor resource use and expenditure.

The site, developed by the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI), will initially be used by 300 schools in the Earth Smart Science program for state primary schools. It will then be rolled out to 1000 schools over three years.

Catalogue Central ([www.cataloguecentral.com.au](http://www.cataloguecentral.com.au)) encourages students and their families to say no to junk mail and access online catalogues instead.

Catalogue Central donates fundraising dollars to a school each time a catalogue is clicked via the school's website. Schools can partner with Catalogue Central and web-based fundraiser Sponsor-ed to develop their own website.

Plenty Parklands Primary, in Melbourne, is one school whose website provides a link to electronic catalogues. ●

"Whenever a child does any good environmental activity, they are given a 'Froggy Award' and it goes into a lucky dip for canteen credit. It's very motivating," says Moriarty.

The school, which is a member of the NSW Sustainable Schools program, has reduced its landfill contribution by 60 per cent.

## Inspiring visit

In Perth, Ardross Primary School works with the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council.

"Our students have visited its fantastic Regional Resource Recovery Centre to learn about waste recovery from yellow-top and green-top bins," says Year 2 teacher Fiona Schaper. They learnt, for example, that mobile phone parts, batteries and ring-pulls from cans can be used to make joints for artificial limbs.

The school converted a storeroom into a collection point for external reuse and recycling agencies. Students monitor the room to check that items are sorted into the right piles.

"It is the students who drive most of our environmental programs," says Schaper. "When a taxi powered with photovoltaic solar panels visited the school, the children were indignant that



**"... the children were indignant that we didn't have solar panels. We now have 40 and our power bill has been reduced by 20 per cent."**

### Fiona Schaper

Teacher, Ardross Public School  
Perth, Western Australia



we didn't have solar panels. We now have 40, and our power bill has been reduced by about 20 per cent."

Having experts visit a school is good for inspiring students, she says. "We've had talks about wind power, alternatives to fossil fuels, and reducing water and waste."

Ardross Primary also works closely with regional and local councils as a member of WA's Waste Wise schools program. Each council has a waste educator who runs activities for schools and helps them set up recycling of batteries and other materials. The activities include 'reduce reuse recycle' awareness, how to compost and set up worm farms, and tours of landfill sites. The program also provides onsite education facilities, council-specific recycling information, a Waste Wise schools kit, free half-day workshops, and ongoing support and advice. Schools can apply for Waste Wise grants.

"We often face the issue of Waste Wise teachers leaving," says Jennifer Weston, the program's community education coordinator. "We encourage schools to write a Waste Wise policy so it is embedded in the school culture and not with an individual teacher. We also help to set up Waste Wise committees

so the responsibility is not with one teacher, and we encourage students to be committee members."

### Leadership commitment

At Balnarring Primary School, in Melbourne, environmental education is embedded in the curriculum.

"Our principal is committed and all classes are studying environmental education," says sustainability coordinator Heather Goddard. "The school's specialist science teacher plans Year 3-6 units covering waste, and the children know they are sending far less waste to landfill."

Goddard, whose role is on a one-day-a-week basis, says she spends much of the time preparing grant applications to make the school's environmental programs happen. "We rely enormously on scrounging money from grants," she says.

"We also have a school services officer who has a time allowance to look after our animals—chooks, goats, rabbits and guinea pigs. It's another indication that our program is well supported by our leadership, which means we are not relying on just one enthusiastic teacher." ●

Cynthia Karna is a freelance writer

## Your say

### Greg Lancaster

Science teacher and sustainability coordinator  
Australind Senior High School, WA



**"Living in a throwaway society, where we don't fix things but buy a new product, doesn't encourage children to live sustainably. At Australind, we try to make them understand that everything they buy, use and throw away leaves a carbon footprint. We have a long way to go in trying to change modern consumer culture, but every small step forward should be celebrated.**

You need a whole-school approach, with structures in place in case enthusiastic teachers burn out or leave. Our recycling boxes and use of green waste are now embedded in school procedure. Green waste from the canteen is fed to the school's chooks which then produce eggs that the canteen, home economics classes and teachers can buy." ●



### Resources

- [www.wastewise.wa.gov.au](http://www.wastewise.wa.gov.au)
- [www.RecyclingNearYou.com.au](http://www.RecyclingNearYou.com.au)
- [www.sustainschools.nsw.edu.au](http://www.sustainschools.nsw.edu.au)
- [www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for\\_educators.html](http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_educators.html)
- [www.mobilemuster.com.au](http://www.mobilemuster.com.au)

