



Changing minds

The Enviroschools movement, now in over 900 New Zealand schools, is empowering pupils to realise a more sustainable life.

By Amelia Reynolds

The principal of Royal Road School, Wayne Leighton, says the primary school's wind-turbine has done such a good job of pumping water into the vegetable garden next to the shade house that now students have to decide what to do with the spare power it has generated.

"So that's part of our next project," he says.

The West Auckland enviroschool is one of 944 primary and secondary schools and early childhood centres across the country which are supported by The Enviroschools Foundation.

Royal Road became an Enviroschool in 2006 and in 2013 was given green-gold status by the organisation, recognising sustainability as an integrated part of the school's vision. At the school, "sustainability" is one of five official values; there is a student-led green council, a troupe of green warriors and even a designated enviro-teacher.

Royal Road's wind turbine, which officially opened last year, is one of many sustainable action projects students have helped design over the past seven years and continue to manage. Other projects include a citrus orchard and feijoa trees, a worm farm and waste management system, a butterfly garden, a pumpkin patch, a harakiki hedge and most recently students germinated and harvested seeds on their seedling table.

The Enviroschools Foundation celebrated its 10th

birthday last year and has grown from a small pilot programme in Hamilton to being in thirty per cent of schools across the country.

Under the umbrella of The Enviroschools Foundation is the Enviroschools Programme, for English medium classes and Te Aho Tū Roa for Maori immersion classes.

Chief executive of the organisation Heidi Mardon says the goal of both programmes is to engage a generation who instinctively understand the benefits of what it means to live sustainably. The best way to do that is through action learning and a commitment from the whole school, she says.

"You can't have kids learning about zero-waste and then seeing the waste-truck going out to the landfill every day," she says.

Mardon says there is no one model for an Enviroschool because projects are determined by the needs of the individual school as identified by the students. One of the first steps an Enviroschool takes is to map out an overall vision for the kind of sustainable school they would like to be.

Schools are also working in conversation with local council regional co-ordinators, Enviroschool facilitators and the wider community.

"As soon as you start getting kids actually expressing how they feel about a situation, and what would they do if they could make a difference to that situation, then they



start to get excited," she says.

Leighton says Royal Road came across Enviroschools by chance after it wanted to restore an area at the back of the school which was a "who's who of pest plants."

Since 2006, that pest area has been planted with over 2000 native plants and Leighton says the school's understanding of what the Enviroschools Programme is really about has grown immensely. The programme has positively affected staff and the wider community too he says.

"At the time we thought it's just learning about native trees and planting but actually you learn that it's an umbrella for all learning."

The best thing to come out of the programme, says Leighton, is seeing children empowered with the knowledge that they personally can contribute to change.

"We talk about all the issues, like global warming, and all of those issues are very real and that's all very big stuff. But we don't want children thinking, 'oh that's too big, we can't make a difference,'" he says.

"All of the projects and all of the action that we take it just fits so easily and it's just a natural part of the school. I think that's a really satisfying thing."

Find out more: enviroschools.org.nz

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*Royal Road students Zyron Prasad and Lizzie
Strong re-pot some native plants.*

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Royal Road School in Massey is part of the EnviroSchools Network. Here Rebekah Phillips, the teacher in charge of the project at Royal Road School, helps (from left to right) Hana Anae Petelo, Lizzie Strong, (background) Zyron Prasad, (foreground) Bernie Cai. Photos: Ted Baghurst