

Waikato ENVIROSCHOOLS

Kōanga 2026 edition

He mihi

Welcome to the Waikato Enviroschools newsletter.

Just like that, we're halfway through 2026! It's a good reminder to slow down, be present and appreciate the small things in life.

There's been plenty to reflect on and celebrate these last two terms and there's much more on the horizon for Waikato Enviroschools.

Last term was full of exciting Enviroschools events for students and teachers. The [Enviroleaders Summit](#) at Ōtāwhao Marae, Te Awamutu College, was a particular highlight. We welcomed around 30 students and look forward to reconnecting with this group, and newcomers, for the final part of the summit.

The [Enviroschools Fund](#) opens again soon with applications welcome between 25 August and 6 October. The fund is available to assist with any projects that support the sustainability kaupapa and provide environmental education. Be sure to reach out to your facilitator if you would like to apply or want to know more about the process.

Thank you to Ōtaua and Springdale schools for submitting posters to the Check, Clean, Dry poster challenge. Ka pai tō mahi! Entries are now closed. Winners will be announced in Term 3.

This term we farewell Greta Dromogol from the Enviroschools team. We thank Greta for the amazing contributions, especially in the Matamata Piako area, and wish her the best for the future.

We hope this newsletter offers an engaging read. Please feel free to forward it to any interested colleagues.

Ngā mihi,

The Enviroschools team

Tā tātou mahi | What we do

Enviroschools is a nationwide programme supported by the Toimata Foundation, founding partner Te Mauri Tau and a large network of regional partners, like us here at Waikato Regional Council.

It helps support early childhood centres and schools on their long-term sustainability journeys, teaching a generation of young people to value and nurture their natural environment.

Our vision is to create a healthy, peaceful, sustainable world through learning and taking action together.

14 regional partners

**50
ECE centres**

**172
schools**

**15% of early childhood
61% of primary and intermediate**

222 Enviroschools

**54,400
tamariki and students**

**58% of secondary
69% of composite and other**

11 collaborators

Waikato Enviroschools acknowledge our funding partners. Their ongoing input and funding is essential to the success of the Enviroschool programme throughout our region.



Ngā kaupapa e haere ake nei | Opportunities

The events and opportunities below are open to all Enviroschools across the Waikato region. Additional local events and opportunities will also be available from time to time. Your facilitator will be in touch to discuss these directly.

For students

South Waikato Connecting to Nature Day

**Thursday, 3 September (Friday, 4 September, back-up rain day),
Lake Moananui Reserve, Arawa Crescent Tokoroa, 9.15am-2pm**

Join us for a fun and inspiring day to connect with and take action for nature. This interschool event is designed to bring together groups of students and multiple community experts from around South Waikato to learn and be inspired about te taiao.

[Register here by 14 August.](#)

A Water of Life Day (Tāupo/Turangi schools)

Thursday, 22 October, Tongariro National Trout Centre

Students will experience a range of engaging water-related educational activities, hosted by different organisations from across the region.

For more information or to register contact
nic.roderick@waikatoregion.govt.nz

Love Bittern Project

Monday, 7 September – Friday, 11 October (Waikato Schools)

Want to learn more about the endangered matuku hūrepo/ Australasian bittern? This workshop will be led by Wendy Ambry from [Love Bittern](#). She has facilitated many workshops across the country.

Contact Cami to express your interest:
Cami.Carty-Melis@waikatoregion.govt.nz

For teachers

Teacher Re-energise – Connecting with the New Curriculum

Thursday, 22 October 3.30pm-4.30pm

A professional learning and development session to help break down the barriers between the curriculum and environmental education.

Come join us for an hour. You'll hear from science education experts and teachers who are putting this into practice, and learn about the new Enviroschools curriculum map for theme areas.

[Register here.](#)

Resource kits and programmes

We have some excellent kits that can be borrowed to support learning outside the classroom.

- Waste Audit Kit
- Stream Study Kit
- Freshwater Detective Kit
- Kauri Protection Programme
- Freshwater Biosecurity Programme
- Marine Biosecurity Resource
- Nature Connection Kit

[Book your resource kits here](#) or get in touch with your facilitator to find out more.

Other opportunities

Virtual learning sessions from Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari

This is an amazing opportunity to hear from conservation experts through a virtual online learning session – the next best thing to a visit!

[Find out more and book here.](#)

Unpacking the NZC Science and Social Sciences (Years 0-10) Curriculum

Thursday, 27 August 3.30pm-4.30pm

The final curriculum documents for these subjects will be published on 12 August. This session will include an overview, exploration of the connections between the learning areas, and ideas for how to implement the new curriculum.

[Register here.](#)

Tātaiao Environmental Education Conference

Monday, 5 October – Wednesday, 7 October, Motu Moana Camp, Blockhouse Bay

Join NZAEE in Auckland for their national conference.

[Find out more and register here.](#)

Outdoor Classroom Day

Thursday, 5 November

Outdoor Classroom Day is a global movement to make time outdoors part of every child's day. In May and November, teachers take children outdoors to play and learn, and this leads to more regular outdoor learning.

[Register here.](#)



Enviroschools website login

As the new term begins, you might have different staff members keen to access Enviroschools resources. Here's a reminder of how to do so.

To access the Enviroschools 'Team Area' and some of the content on our Padlet, you'll need to [register here](#).

Multiple staff members from a school can register. Each person will just need a unique email address and username.

You will need to have access to your email and know your school or centre's MoE number to complete the registration process (you can find your MoE number on the Education Counts website educationcounts.govt.nz).

If, during the registration process, the email doesn't arrive, please check your junk mail.

Once registered, you'll be able to login to the Team Area using the email or username you chose, and the password you created.



He tīwhiri | Quick sustainability tips

Spring is coming! A great way to increase biodiversity and get a better yield in your school garden is to encourage pollinators, like bees and butterflies.

Planting nectar-rich flowers, providing shallow water stations, avoiding chemical sprays and leaving some wild areas will all help.

Nectar-rich natives will also help feed native birds like tūi and tauhou (silvereve).

[King Seeds](#) has some great bee friendly seed packs and resources for school fundraising.

Great flowers and herbs for pollinators include bergamot, borage, calendula, cornflower, echinacea, rosemary, lavender, marigold, pineapple sage, sage, swan plants (for monarch butterflies) sunflowers, thyme and zinnia.

Flowering native plants include hebe species (for example, koromiko), kōwhai, kākā beak (clianthus) tī kōuka (cabbage tree), harakeke (flax) and mānuka.

For more info on pollinators, see our [Backyard Ecosystem- Bees!](#) & [Backyard Ecosystem- Butterflies!](#) resources.

Ngā hua | Our stories

Of worms and wonder

Reported by Jo Buchan (Facilitator, Hauraki and Thames Coromandel)

One of the most impressive things about Miller Ave School is how their students helped shape their journey from the start. They created a Vision Map and displayed it in the foyer, making their goals visible to students, staff and whānau.

Ideas came through a suggestion box and regular updates in The School Mascot newsletter. It wasn't a plan handed down from above, but one built by the people who would bring it to life.

One priority stood out early: waste minimisation.

A former student wanted to see a working worm farm at the school. It was a simple idea, but best ones often are. From that suggestion grew a project that taught students about composting, waste reduction and the quiet wonders of worms.

With support from Lenny at Xero Waste and plenty of research, students built and maintained the worm farm.

Food scraps became compost. Compost produced worm tea. Worm tea was sold to the community, and the proceeds helped fund the work of the EnviroGroup.

The project connected environmental learning with enterprise and community engagement. Students weren't learning about sustainability in theory – they were living it.

The Vision Map also identified another goal: making the school a more attractive and welcoming place.

Rather than buying new materials, the EnviroGroup looked at what was already available. Old furniture was restored, unwanted items were repurposed and discarded materials found new uses.

The changes happened gradually, project by project. Together, they created a school environment that feels cared for, reflects student ideas and aligns with what matters to them.

It's about more than worms, compost or recycled furniture.

Whether underground or beneath a worn wooden surface, students learned that value can often be hidden, waiting to be revealed by curiosity, creativity and collaboration.



Mara Kai comp cooks up success

Reported by Gypsy Taylor-Hewitt (Facilitator, Waipā and Hamilton)

Students from six Waikato schools gathered in the kitchens at Rototuna Junior High School in May to take part in a cooking competition, following weeks of work in their school gardens and kitchens.

In the lead-up to the event, eight teams documented their journeys through books, cardboard displays and slide presentations. Students reflected on the successes and challenges they experienced while growing and harvesting ingredients from their school grounds. While some enjoyed strong harvests, others faced setbacks and relied on support from their communities.

Staff, whānau and fellow students donated ingredients, including walnuts, apples and cream, to help teams complete their dishes.

On competition day, students worked in teams to prepare their meals, demonstrating good communication skills, sharing their ideas with judges and maintaining clean workstations throughout the process.



After cooking, each team presented its dish to judges Brent and Dan from Hayes Common restaurant, explaining the inspiration behind their creations and the ingredients they had used.

The dishes reflected each school's experiences, community connections and creativity.

The judges noted the high standard of entries across all teams and praised the effort students had put into both the growing and cooking aspects of the challenge.

The event highlighted the value of growing and preparing food, as well as the support required to make programmes like this successful.

Parents helped transport students to the event. Teachers contributed time during lunch breaks, after school and over the holidays.

The competition also showed how students can use creativity, teamwork and community support to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.



Kauri protection at Karāpiro

Reported by Alex Daniel (Facilitator, Waipā, Hamilton and Matamata-Piako)

The Kauri Protection trailer rolled into Karāpiro School carrying some important cargo: a giant kauri tree model built by Wētā Workshop, virtual reality headsets and a collection of activities designed to help students understand one of Aotearoa's most iconic native trees.

The day began with an introduction to kauri trees, their cultural and ecological significance, and the threat posed by kauri dieback disease.

Students learned about the microscopic pathogen that causes the disease and how it can be spread through infected soil on shoes, tyres and equipment. They also learnt that Waikato's southern kauri forests are important because many remain free from the disease.

From there, students rotated through a series of hands-on activities. One of the highlights was the detailed Wētā Workshop kauri model, which helped bring the scale of these remarkable trees to life. Students were surprised to discover a kauri's root system can extend far beyond the trunk itself, making even a healthy-looking forest more vulnerable than it appears. A surprisingly popular favourite was the boot-cleaning challenge. After deliberately dirtying their shoes with soil, students practised the process of scrubbing them.

Cleaning soil from footwear, they learned, is one of the most important actions people can take to reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

With clean boots, the students stepped into another world through the Kauri Pou Kaitiaki virtual reality experience. Wearing VR headsets, they were immersed in a 360-degree journey through kauri forests, learning about the tree's cultural, spiritual and ecological significance, and reinforcing the actions needed to protect them.

Throughout the day, students asked thoughtful questions and made connections between the activities and their own role as kaitiaki. They learnt not only about the serious threat facing kauri, but also that protecting these giants can start with something as simple as cleaning a pair of muddy boots.

The experience left Karāpiro School students with a greater appreciation of New Zealand's kauri forests and a clearer understanding of how their actions today can help protect these treasured trees for future generations.



The curious case of the cardboard oven

Reported by Nic Roderick (Facilitator, Taupō and South Waikato)

This is a story about S'mores, science and the Sun. It also stars Nature Nerds fuelled by energy, imagination and treats.

Tirau Primary students were keen to explore the EnviroSchools Energy Theme Area as a focus for the term.

Classrooms were quickly decorated with cellophane lightbulbs, and tamariki were eager to learn and share their ideas.

Some of the self-styled 'Nature Nerd' Enviroleaders had tracked their daily activities in personal energy logs.

Comparing notes with classmates helped them realise how much energy comes from food and water, and how important those fuels are for doing the things we enjoy.

Together, the students explored different forms of energy, including solar, wind, hydro and geothermal power.

They learned New Zealand gets 70-80 per cent of its electricity from renewables and how, if we could harness the power of the sun for one hour, it could fuel the entire world for a year.

They also discussed what life might be like without electricity. Looking at examples like Owairoa School's Black Out Day prompted conversations about how they could reduce energy use in their own school.

Later, a sweet little experiment got underway. A group of Nature Nerds built solar ovens from cardboard boxes, tinfoil, black paper and glass.

Their goal was to see whether sunlight alone could cook S'mores in 30 minutes.

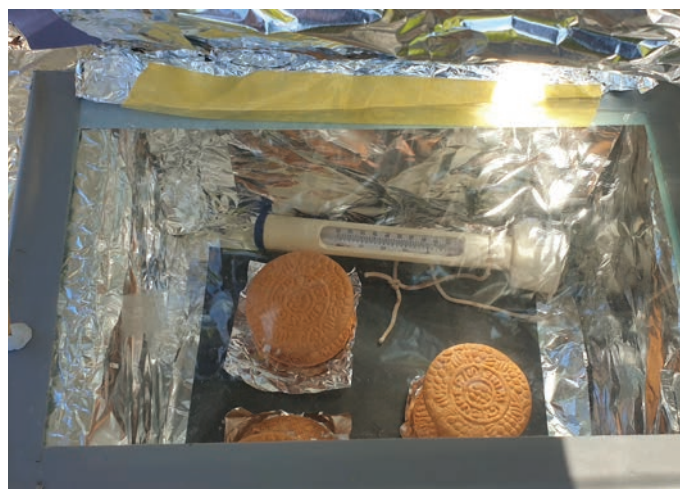
The sun was shining. The students adjusted their ovens to capture as much as possible.

They kept a close eye on the temperature. The thermometer rose from 20°C to 48°C. The chocolate softened, then melted.

The cardboard ovens had worked – their curiosity paid off.

The thermometer provided the data. The chocolate-covered smiles provided the proof.

With a S'more in hand, one student declared that he wished school was always like this.



We are pleased to share that an [independent evaluation](#) of the Waikato EnviroSchools programme has highlighted the strengths and impact of our work over the past three years.

Commissioned by Waikato Regional Council and undertaken by The Knowledge Institute, the evaluation examined programme delivery, outcomes and the value EnviroSchools provides to the council and the wider community.

The review concluded that: ***"The EnviroSchools programme is a high-performing, well-established programme that successfully maintains a high standard of delivery and strong realisation of outcomes."***

This affirmation reflects the dedication of our facilitators as well as the educators, tamariki, and rangatahi, co-funding council partners and community collaborators who make this kaupapa possible.



He rauemi | Resource spotlight

Potato in a Bucket challenge

Who can grow the biggest crop from just one seed potato? That's the Potato in a Bucket challenge.

Students plant, nurture, measure and harvest their crop while exploring food growing, sustainability, science and māra kai.

With prizes for categories such as heaviest harvest, most potatoes and biggest potato on offer, there's plenty of fun to be had.

Don't be a couch potato, get students growing with this [fun resource pack](#).



Ngā ringa hāpai | Enviroschools Waikato facilitation team

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Find out more

enviroschools.org.nz

Visit the team area for a great selection of national news, resources and ideas. To register, go to 'Team Area Login' and click 'Register'. Please note that you'll need your school or centre's MoE number to complete the registration process. You can find it on educationcounts.govt.nz.

Waikato Enviroschools Facebook

facebook.com/groups/waikatoenviroschools

Join our friendly and supportive closed forum to share inspiration, thoughts, learnings and more.



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