

Childcare Policy No.33: Environmental Sustainability

Best Practice – Quality Area 3

Purpose

This policy will provide guidelines to assist Pines Learning Childcare to take an active role in caring for the environment, and promoting and contributing to a sustainable future.

1. Values

Pines Learning Childcare is committed to:

- promoting respect for, and an appreciation of, the natural environment among all at the service
- fostering children’s capacity to understand and respect the natural environment, and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land
- supporting the development of positive attitudes and values in line with sustainable practices
- ensuring that educators and other staff engage in sustainable practices during the operation of the service.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Persons with Management or Control, Nominated Supervisor, Persons in Day to Day Charge, educators, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and others attending the programs and activities of Pines Learning Childcare.

3. Background and Legislation

Background

“One of the most significant responsibilities that [early childhood] professionals have is to support children to retain the sense of awe and wonder that they are born with, to add to that a desire to nurture and protect what is beautiful, and to encourage them to appreciate that there are many possibilities for honouring life and wonders that the world holds” (Stonehouse, A. (2006) NSW Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services – refer to Sources).

Current research confirms that experiences in the early years help establish lifelong behaviour and values, and this reinforces the need for sustainability education to be included in early childhood programs. It is important for children to understand their place in the world and the role that they can play in protecting the environment. Children should learn to be environmentally responsible and be empowered to make a difference, and this learning should not wait until the ‘formal education’ of primary school. Elliot and Davis (refer to *Sources*) state that “early childhood educators have an active and significant role to play ensuring children experience connections with the natural environment in meaningful way which will ultimately promote action for sustainability”.

Environmental education can be defined as learning *about* the environment and how natural systems function; the interconnectedness of plants, animals, humans and the planet we inhabit.

Environmental education promotes the growth of knowledge, skills and values about the environment, often with a focus on science and nature. In an early childhood setting, environmental education is integrated into everyday decisions made as part of the curriculum.

Sustainability can be defined in a broader and more holistic context of education *for* the environment. The complexities of social, environmental and economic systems are acknowledged, and their implications for sustaining life are considered. The aim of sustainability education is to

promote a sense of responsibility, respect, empowerment, active participation, enquiry and a desire for social change (adapted from ECA Environmental Sustainability Policy). The goal of sustainability education is to empower children and adults to think and act in ways that meet their immediate needs without jeopardising the potential of future generations to meet *their* own needs. Sustainable practice in early childhood settings requires a holistic approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into service operations.

The *National Quality Standard* (Quality Area 3: Physical Environment) includes a discussion on the service taking an active role in caring for its environment and contributing to a sustainable future. As service providers to the community, education and care services have an opportunity not only to make reductions to waste, water and energy consumption through their operations, but to role-model sustainable living to young children in a world facing climate change, increasing levels of air, land and water pollution, and depleted natural resources.

Legislation and standards

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*
- *National Quality Standard*, Quality Area 3: Physical Environment

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: <http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/>
- Commonwealth Legislation – ComLaw: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/>

4. Definitions

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

The service provider is Pines Learning and the Approved Provider is Pines Learning Inc. The Approved Provider delegates its responsibility for the day to day operation of the service to the Nominated Supervisor.

Environmental sustainability: The responsible use and management of the planet's resources to ensure that they remain available and uncompromised for future generations to use and enjoy.

5. Sources and Related Policies

Sources

- *Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia:* <http://education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework#key%20documents>
- Department of Education, Australian Government (2011) *'Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia:* <http://docs.education.gov.au/documents/educators-guide-early-years-learning-framework-australia>
- Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC): <http://www.eeec.org.au/index.php>
- *Guide to the National Quality Standard*, ACECQA: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Department of Education, Australian Government, *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia:* https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-05/my_time_our_place_framework_for_school_age_care_in_australia_0.pdf
- *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework:* <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veyldf.aspx>

- *Child Safe Environment Policy*
- *Curriculum Development Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Sun Protection Policy*
- *Supervision of Children Policy*
- *Water Safety Policy*

6. Policy Procedures

6.1 The Approved Provider and Persons with Management and Control are responsible for:

- i. collaborating with the Nominated Supervisor, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)
- ii. allocating the necessary resources to implement the identified environmental sustainability strategies at the service
- iii. ensuring the Nominated Supervisor and all staff are aware of their responsibilities under this *Environmental Sustainability Policy*
- iv. ensuring the identified strategies (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability) are implemented at the service
- v. ensuring parents/guardians are aware of, and have access to, the *Environmental Sustainability Policy*.

6.2 The Nominated Supervisor and Person in Day to Day Charge is responsible for:

- i. collaborating with the Approved Provider, educators, staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)
- ii. implementing identified strategies for which they have responsibility at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)
- iii. ensuring environmental education and practices are incorporated into the curriculum (refer to *Curriculum Development Policy*)
- iv. providing families with information about environmentally sustainable practices e.g. through displays, fact sheets and local community resources, and by ensuring that they have access to the *Environmental Sustainability Policy*
- v. making recommendations to the Approved Provider about green and sustainable options for the service, that reflect the guidelines within this policy
- vi. seeking and applying for grants, where appropriate, to support the implementation of strategies within this policy
- vii. keeping up to date with current research, resources and best practice through newsletters, journals and support agencies such as Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC).

6.3 Educators and other staff are responsible for:

- i. collaborating with the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, fellow educators/staff, parents/guardians, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)
- ii. implementing identified strategies for which they have responsibility at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)

- iii. engaging in activities that support the service to become more environmentally sustainable (e.g. recycling)
- iv. incorporating environmental education and sustainable practices within the curriculum
- v. planning opportunities for children to connect with nature and the natural world at the service, including on excursions and at other service events
- vi. incorporating celebrations of environmental awareness into the program e.g. National Tree Day, National Recycling Week, Clean Up Australia Day and Walk to Work Day
- vii. keeping up to date with current research, resources and best practice through newsletters, journals and support agencies such as Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC).

6.4 Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- i. collaborating with the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators, staff, children and others at the service to identify environmental sustainability strategies for implementation at the service (refer to Attachment 1 – Strategies for environmental sustainability)
- ii. following the strategies identified and outlined in this *Environmental Sustainability Policy*
- iii. encouraging their children to adopt environmentally sustainable practices at both the service and at home.

Volunteers and students, while at the service, are responsible for following this policy and its procedures.

6.5 Evaluation

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- i. regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- ii. monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- iii. keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- iv. revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- v. notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures.

6.6 Attachments

- i. Attachment 1: Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

Attachment 1

Strategies for Environmental Sustainability

This checklist can be used to promote discussion and formulate an environmental sustainability policy for the service. Many of these strategies were drawn from Mia Hughes' *Climbing the little green steps: How to promote sustainability within early childhood services in your local area* (refer to *Sources*). Other strategies can be added to the checklist as required – refer to *Sources* as a starting point for further information. Ensure that responsibility for implementation is allocated to each strategy adopted e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, educators, parents/guardians, children etc. Agreed strategies should form the basis of the service's *Environmental Sustainability Policy*.

Strategy	Adopt (Yes/No)	What/How we implement strategies.
Data Collection		
Collect baseline data from energy and water bills, and monitor waste collection. Use information gathered to set reduction targets and evaluate whether they have been achieved.	NO	As a part of a larger organisation it is not possible to identify our direct costs.
Green purchasing		
Purchase local products.	YES	Plants/herbs are purchased from local nurseries.
Purchase recycled products.	YES	Use of resources from Recycle Rescue and also boxes/cardboard/paper/cards are donated by staff/families/community members.
Purchase energy and water efficient products.	YES	Our washing machine has an overall rating of 5, our dryer has a rating of 7. These were purchased in 2020.
Purchase organic produce.	N/A	
Purchase items with minimal packaging.	YES	Reusable shopping bags are used for all local shopping. Any supplies ordered online are packed in cardboard boxes which are either recycled or used in learning experiences.
Purchase chemical-free, green cleaning products.	YES	In practice since 2015.
Purchase formaldehyde-free paint.		Investigate purchasing formaldehyde-free paint.
Waste		

Minimise waste from one-use, throwaway products (e.g. paper towels, disposable nappies, wet wipes) by changing behaviours and procedures, and using alternative products. The following are some suggestions:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install a low energy electric hand dryer. 	YES	Some children are afraid/frightened to use the hand dryers so we provide recycled paper towel as well.
Encourage children to bring a rubbish-free lunch/snack in a reusable container.	YES	We discuss packaging/rubbish when sitting with them at the food table. We ask parents via newsletter to cut down on wrapping/pre-packaged food.
Adopt green cleaning practices by using safe and sustainable cleaning products and methods.	YES	In 2015 we changed all cleaning products to environmentally/people friendly products.
Recycle plastic waste (codes #1–#7), glass, paper, cardboard, foil and metal.	YES	We have clearly labelled recycle bins/redcycle bins in use. The kindergarten children are responsible for taking redcycle waste to Coles.
Investigate composting of food scraps.	YES	We use a Bokashi bin to help reduce rubbish/waste and educate children regarding a positive way to use some food scraps.
Explore the waste hierarchy of refuse within the educational program i.e. reduce, reuse, repair and recycle.	YES	We use recycled resources, natural materials and donated items in our program.
Refrain from using food items for children’s play experiences (e.g. rice, pasta, jelly etc.) as this is wasteful of both the food items, and the water and energy used in production.	YES	We do not use food items for children’s play.
Energy		
Turn off computers and/or screens when not in use.	YES	Educators turn off all computers when not in use and at the end of each day.
Turn off computers and electrical equipment before leaving the building.	YES	This is done at the end of each day and marked on our end of day checklist.
Close doors and windows when heating or air conditioning the building where possible, while maintaining adequate ventilation. Strategies must be developed for indoor-outdoor programs to enable this to occur.	YES	Heating/cooling is temperature controlled and only in use during operating hours.

Turn off fridges that are not in use during extended holiday periods (ensure no food remains and the fridge is cleaned well beforehand).	YES	Refrigerator is cleaned and turned off for our end of year three week closure.
Turn lights off when not required. Install light sensors where possible.	YES	Our bathroom light has a sensor. We only use three banks of lights in the main room.
Upgrade old appliances with energy efficient appliances.	YES	Energy Star rating is always considered when purchasing new appliances.
Water		
Install 5,000–20,000 litre water tanks and consider connecting these to toilets.	YES	Tank water is collected and used for our garden and any water play.
Set limits for water use during play, while acknowledging that water play is important and that children need to use water in order to learn how to conserve it.	YES	We always discuss water use with children and teach through our program.
Ensure that water from troughs and bowls is reused to water the garden.	YES	Water collected in our clothes dryer is used to water the garden.
Install dual flush toilets.	YES	We have dual flush toilets and we teach/discuss this with children.
Biodiversity		
Grow food crops in vegetable gardens.	YES	We grow seasonal vegetables for the children to eat.
Plant fruit trees.	YES	We have planted an apple tree and lilly pilly tree.
Grow a diverse range of plants, and develop children’s understanding of how plant diversity encourages animal diversity.	YES	We grow a diverse range of plants in our garden and teach children how plant diversity encourages animal diversity through our program. We collect eucalyptus leaves for our stick insects and discuss with the children about only taking just what we need.
Grow indigenous (native) and water-wise plants.	YES	We have planted Kangaroo Paw (Anigozanthos), Lilly Pilly, Australian daisy (Brachyscome), Bottlebrush (Callistemon) and Bush Mint. All are native plants which are considered water wise.

Water plants in the play space using recycled water where possible. Plants are a precious resource for the planet and should be protected and nurtured.	YES	We water our garden using recycled water and teach children the importance of water and plants through our program.
Transport		
Create prominent, effective spaces for the storage of bikes and prams to promote riding and walking to staff and families.	YES	We provide a space for families to store prams and bikes. We do not have a large area for this but we do accommodate any families who require this.
Curriculum		
Role-model sustainable practices and behaviours. Actions such as reusing water from a sink and switching off lights when not in use can have a large impact on young children, who are at a formative stage with respect to skills and attitudes.	YES Through role-modelling, discussions and our program.	
Aim to counteract the 'throwaway' mentality that children experience every day in relation to waste.		
Take every opportunity to talk with young children about sustainable practices, and encourage older children to take part in these practices.		
The curriculum offers many opportunities to explore sustainable issues and practices. The following are some suggestions:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an 'earth hour' each day where no lights/minimal lighting is used e.g. during rest, relaxation or sleep times. • Use a range of pictures, books and stories that address environmental sustainability issues. • Have waste-free days. • Use improvised, recycled and natural materials for program activities. • Examine damaged household appliances and explore whether they can be repaired. • Play a recycling game to promote an understanding of items that can be recycled. • Investigate alternatives to texta pens and liquid paint, such as powder paint and refillable markers or pencils. 	YES We only have three of five lights on each day as we have good natural light, we then turn off another light for approximately two hours each day during rest times. All educators are committed to embedding sustainability into our program. We have two educators responsible for overseeing this, including developing a sustainability calendar, researching sustainable practises such as waste free days and alternatives to paint/textas used. We have many books, games and resources to support the children's learning and understanding of sustainability.	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join Environmental Education in Early Childhood (EEEC) for more ideas. 	<p>We use recycled items from Recycle Rescue and donations from staff, families and the community in our program.</p> <p>We have a handyperson who fixes toys and equipment and we only buy high quality items rather than cheaper ones that may break and need to be discarded.</p> <p>Each month a kindergarten child is nominated to be the water and garden monitor, they talk to other children about turning taps off and not wasting water when hand washing, watering the garden and playing.</p> <p>The ECT and Kindergarten children are responsible for collecting all redcycle material throughout Pines Learning and taking it to our local Coles.</p> <p>We joined COOL Australia in 2015 and Educators undertake regular PD in Sustainability.</p> <p>We have a digital free day once a week.</p>	
<p>Family and community involvement</p>		
<p>Inform families about this policy and the service's approach to environmental sustainability through information sessions, photo displays and newsletters etc.</p> <p>Involve/encourage families to embrace sustainable practices at home.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Through newsletters and sustainability journal (all online to reduce paper) and displays in the room.</p> <p>Seeds/plants are sent home with children throughout the year.</p>
<p>Design a poster outlining the key principles of environmental sustainability, for display in the foyer of the service. This may include a charter of principles and key targets to be achieved.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>Educators overseeing Sustainability to design and implement with input from educators and children.</p>
<p>Become involved in community events such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day and Clean Up Australia Day.</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>We take part in many community events such as Earth Hour, World Environment Day, Clean up Australia Day, World Ocean Day. We have a calendar of events relating to Environment/Sustainability.</p>