



STUDENTS LEAD OUR SCHOOL'S CIRCULAR ECONOMY

By Sofia Courtney, Year 6 teacher and Sustainability Leader at Wembley Primary School.

The cyclical nature of work in a school is inherent in all its parts. Every year, a new cohort of captains; every year, a new subset of our volunteer community. Our sustainability program has taken time to get off the ground, but it is gaining traction. The challenge lies in setting up programs and projects that withstand the test of time from one calendar year to the next. In this article, when discussing 'we', this is the hard work of our school Sustainability Captains (Year 6 students),

our Wembley Waste Warriors (parent committee) and volunteer staff members. Our dedicated team is incredibly keen and committed to integrating a mindset that will spread the circular economy message throughout our *Wembley Primary School* community.

*Above: A beautiful zucchini grown with the school's compost.
Photography: Wembley Primary School.*

OUR CAPTAINCY AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

We have always had a leadership program in Year 6, however, have developed our program to include a greater student voice and action over the past few years. For two subsequent years, our sustainability captains have been involved in the *Global Citizenship Student Ambassador Program* run by *Lottie Dowling from Meg Languages*. Through this program, our captains have learnt invaluable leadership skills through the lens of sustainability. They have successfully brainstormed, planned, implemented, presented and reflected upon their waste reduction projects in our school. The passing of the baton from one year to the next has been flawless, as the new incumbents have easily been able to build on the foundations of the previous year.

“I think learning about sustainability gives you a new perspective on the world. It helps you see things differently and understand how your actions can make a difference. It's something everyone should learn more about.”

-Macy, 2024 Sustainability Captain.

WASTE-FREE WEDNESDAY

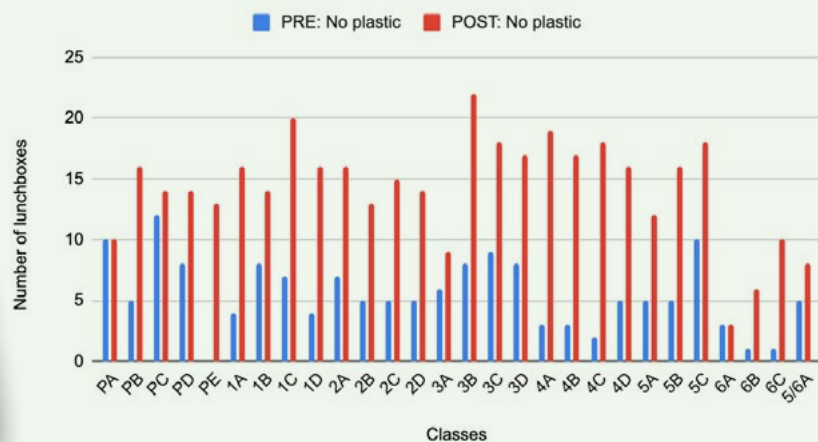
In 2023, our Junior School Council raised a petition and money for an in-bed composting system called a *Subpod*, which sits in our school veggie beds nourishing our revolving plantings. We did a mini-waste audit in the upper years to see the quantity of fruit and vegetable waste found in classroom rubbish bins. This information was also shared to our classes as a part of their Monday morning meetings.

We soon realised the need for further action, and the captains started ‘Waste-Free Wednesday’ to also reduce our waste impact. We collected data on our first ever Waste-Free Wednesday, and had an amazing response from our community. The captains spent time photographing some of the impressive lunch boxes as a resource to inspire our families to join in, shared on our website.

The blue lines show how many lunch boxes had no plastic previously, and the red lines show how many had no plastic on our first Wednesday!



WPS Waste-Free Lunchboxes





COMPOSTING AND LEARNING

In 2024, the captains devised a timetabled program to collect fruit and vegetable waste from classrooms to feed our compost bin. We soon noticed the enthusiasm from students all over the school regarding this program and excitement about the compost's worms!

Our student captains also made posters to educate the classes about what can and can't go in our compost bins. This program led to a weekly gardening session where we planted, weeded and collected from our veggie beds. The incredible produce was shared with our parent and caregiver community during assembly, as well as our staff members. The reactivation of these vegetable beds provides an alternative space for students to help out around the school, and to learn about cyclical planting and regenerating our school garden.

ELIMINATING THE NEED FOR NEW

Our school has always had a dedicated second-hand clothing supply for uniforms. Students and families are able to help themselves to this clothing at no cost, and, over the years, we have seen many families economically supported by access to this resource. In 2024, inspired by the *ABC War on Waste* and associated webinars, we embarked on our first clothes swap. When researching the impact of waste and 'fast fashion' on our planet, our captains could see the need to close the loop within our school community.



Over '*Recycling Week*' in 2024, we encouraged members of the community to drop off clothes to a central point in the school. When families dropped their clothes off, they added their name to a list. The Sustainability Captains organised the clothes into categories to make it easy to find what people wanted. Over the week, we had three swap times. The first day (during play time) was open to anyone who had brought in clothes, as we wanted them to have first pick. The second day was open to everyone. Finally, we brought the leftovers to our Friday assembly for parents and caregivers to have a look at. Across the week, we went from many bags of donations to one small shopping bag (mostly of clothes too small for primary children), which we donated to a local op shop. We were grateful to our generous community for donating clothes that were of high quality and in fabulous condition for swapping. It made for a hugely successful event.

Also, during Recycling Week, the school captains ran a writing competition on the topic of waste. We planned writing lessons for the week, then students read about and created their own recycling stories. We published the winners, and they are on now display in our school resource library.

NEXT STEPS

Off the back of our highly successful clothes swap, we plan to extend this to other swap events, such as a book and toy swap. We are also looking to place our sustainability lens over some of our whole-school events to integrate collections for the Container Deposit Scheme, and to encourage BYO drink containers where appropriate. Our writing competition was a huge success and we plan to repeat this in 2025.

The sky really is the limit, and we will be guided by our student leaders as to what they believe will be most successful within our student community.

Top left: The school's in-ground composting system in their vegetable beds. *Above:* One table from the school's epic clothes swap. *Inset image:* The front cover of a special book, made by the school sustainability captains. *All photography:* Wembley Primary School.