

Waikato ENVIROSCHOOLS

Ngahuru 2025 edition

He mihi

Welcome to the Waikato Enviroschools newsletter. We hope your year is off to a great start.

This pānui is packed with inspiring stories from across our network, and fantastic opportunities for teachers and students alike.

Welcome Tapu School, St Anthony's Catholic School (Huntly) and Piopio Primary to Enviroschools! With the recent additions to the whānau, more than half of all secondary schools in our region are now Enviroschools (up from 43 per cent since our last pānui).

As our network continues to grow, we're always looking at innovative ways to better support schools with their sustainability journeys.

In 2024, we piloted a new model at Whareorino school to better support teaching in remote locations. We look forward to exploring this approach with more schools this year. If you're interested, check out this info on [Enviroschools facilitation for remote schools](#) and speak to your facilitator when you're ready to get started.

In Term 1, we're looking forward to hosting a series of environmental education events for teachers and students – check out the 'Opportunities' section below for details.

Our annual Māra Kai Challenge is fast approaching! The cook-off will take place in May, and Term 1 is the perfect time to get your garden growing if you're thinking of taking part. This is a fun and celebratory experience where students' strengths and creativity are recognised. For inspiration from previous years, check out this [article](#) and [video](#). Talk to your facilitator to get involved.

We look forward to receiving applications for the Enviroschools fund. It opens again on 3 March and closes on 14 April. If you have a project in mind, please work with your facilitator to discuss your ideas and work through the application.

We're pleased to welcome Benoir Midwood Murray to our facilitation team. Benoir is supporting schools in Taupō and South Waikato. We thank Jenni Scothern-King for all her hard work over the years and wish her well as she transitions to retirement.

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

Ngā mihi,
The Enviroschools team

Tā mātou 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

219 Enviroschools

**51
ECE centres**

**168
schools**

**54,400
tamariki and students**

**14% of early childhood
59% of primary and intermediate**

**51% of secondary
67% of composite and other**

3 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



For students

Seaweek

1-9 March

Seaweek – kaupapa moana – is New Zealand’s annual national week celebrating the sea. Check out the awesome events, community action projects and resources on the Seaweek page. Or find even more inspiration on the NZAEE website.

In the Waikato, **we’re celebrating Seaweek with a Marine Guardians event in Whaingaroa | Raglan on 24 March.**

It’s designed to give students hands-on experiences to deepen their understanding of the ways we can protect our marine ecosystems from invasive pest species. [Register here by Tuesday, 18 March.](#)

Enviroleaders Climate Summit

13-15 May, O-Tāwhao Marae, Te Awamutu College

Waikato secondary student Enviroleaders are invited to our fourth annual Climate Summit.

Gathering together in a noho marae (overnight stay) setting with fun team and nature-based activities in the local environment, students will build leadership skills and develop a deeper understanding of climate change.

Places are limited. Find out more about [last year’s experience](#) and [register your interest here by 31 March.](#)

Māra Kai Challenge

27 May Hukanui School Living room Kitchen, Hamilton

Get growing and cooking this term and experience [Hukanui School’s Living Room Kitchen](#) at the Term 2 Interschool Māra Kai Challenge. [Register here by 5 April.](#)

For teachers

Water Workshop

11 March, 3.30-5.30pm (rain date 19 March), The Fairfield Project, Kirikiriroa | Hamilton

An afterschool professional development workshop designed to inspire and grow knowledge in water-focussed teaching and learning through hands-on activities exploring our freshwater environment and water conservation.

There will also be introductions to our Smart Water, Freshwater Guardians and Stream Health resources. [Register here by 11 March.](#)

Holistic Reflection Professional Development Workshop

3 April, 3.30-5pm, online

Find out more about our revised Holistic Reflection process. Holistic Reflection has evolved, supporting your school to reflect in a comprehensive, meaningful and celebratory way. Hear from other schools who have recently reflected and learn about how they created their own process. [Register here by 1 April.](#)

World Water Day

22 March

World Water Day – held on 22 March every year since 1993 – is an annual United Nations observance focusing on the importance of fresh water.

This year’s World Water Day theme is around glacier preservation. If you’d like to get involved, why not check out this activation kit with fun facts and interactive questions to explore water’s journey and the critical role glaciers play in the Earth’s water cycle.

To celebrate World Water Day, we are hosting events for students across the region.

Freshwater Guardians - Fully subscribed

18 March, Les Batkin Reserve, Tūākau

The event will give students hands-on experiences to deepen their understanding of how we can protect our rivers and streams.

Through a range of engaging activities, they’ll explore water quality, biosecurity and conservation while building a sense of kaitiakitanga for our waterways.

Water Encounters

20 and 21 March, National Trout Centre, Tūrangi

The event will give students hands-on experiences to deepen their understanding of why water is a precious resource.

Through a range of engaging activities, they’ll explore the vital role of water in ecosystems, water’s importance to people and nature, and how we can protect and conserve it for the future. [Register here by 12 March.](#)

Enviroschools fund open

3 March - 17 April

Waikato Regional Council’s Enviroschools Fund assists Enviroschools with environmental projects, providing one-off grants to initiatives that directly enhance and/or benefit the environment or provide environmental education.

Applications can be for up to \$5,000. Contact your facilitator for advice on the application process or [apply here.](#)



Kūmara Harvest

Following on from our initial workshops last year looking at the history and propagation of kumara, we'll be harvesting kūmara at a community māra kai and discussing sorting and storage.

The dates are weather dependent, with details to be confirmed closer to the time.

The workshops will be held in Hamilton at the Fairfield Project, adjacent to Fairfield College and at Gudex Court māra kai, adjacent to Te Au o Tamatea St Andrews Middle School. [Register here by 24 April.](#)



Tagging Monarch Butterflies

The Moths and Butterflies of NZ Trust will be working with environmental educators and teachers on a monarch butterfly tagging STEM project throughout Term 1 and Term 2. [Find out more here.](#)

Climate Change Education

Climate change can be a tricky topic to teach. Storms, flooding and sea level rise can feel all too close to home for young people, who may be fearful about what their future holds.

Join our 2025 Climate Cohort, a new professional network for teachers, and together we can help rangatahi navigate this constantly challenging and often overwhelming kaupapa.

Membership is completely FREE, courtesy of the education team at Waikato Regional Council.

Member benefits

- Receive support from an environmental education facilitator.
- Access facilitated professional development.
- Make connections with climate change experts.
- Network with like-minded teachers

We're seeking expressions of interest from educators teaching students from Year 6 to Year 10 who would like support delivering the resource *Climate Change: prepare today, live well tomorrow*, hosted on the NZAEE website.

About the resource

[Huringa Āhuarangi: whakareri mai kia haumarū āpōpō - Climate Change: prepare today, live well tomorrow](#) was developed by Aotearoa New Zealand educator Sian Carvell, in collaboration with both national and local science and education experts and organisations.

The resource will support you to deliver a science-based, integrated learning programme, weaving in mātauranga Māori and Te Tai Unuora – a wellbeing guide. It's designed to support and empower all learners to have an individual and collective voice, to take action, and to play their part in a larger, systematic response.

[Register your interest here.](#)

Other opportunities from NZAEE

Bug of the Year

The Entomological Society of New Zealand is proud to host the Bug of the Year competition. Vying for the top spot in 2025 are 21 nominees. Voting opens 1 January and closes 17 February. [Find out more and pick your favourite.](#)

Outdoor Classroom Day

8 May, 9:00 am-4:00pm

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.](#)

Seaweed Webinar for Students: Planet Ocean

6 March, 2:00pm-2:45pm

Join secondary students from across Australia and New Zealand to hear from three marine scientists researching the impacts of climate change on our ocean communities, including kelp and coral ecology and adaptations and the future of marine turtles on a warming planet. [Register here.](#)

LEARNZ: Love Rimurimu

3 March

Join this free virtual field trip during Seaweed to explore seaweed restoration and cultural connections. [Register here.](#)

NZAEE Webinar: Nature Connection for Aotearoa Educators

11 March, 4:00pm-5:00pm

This is the first in a webinar series designed to support and share examples of nature connection for Aotearoa educators. Guests Donna, Sarah and Thea will share their perspectives on nature connection in an Aotearoa context, and why it's important for educators and ākonga. [Register here.](#)

SLH: Taking a knowledge systems approach in the classroom

20 February

In the latest of this webinar series, hear from Pauline Waiti, Lian Soh and Rosemary Hipkins as they explore examples of mātauranga and science in the classroom. [Register here.](#)

He tīwhiri | Quick sustainability tips

Autumn is the perfect time to plant hardy winter crops like spinach, kale and broad beans, setting up the garden for a productive cooler season.

Many schools may return to overgrown gardens after summer, with plants that have gone to seed – but that’s nothing to worry about!

Students can collect and save these seeds for replanting next season. For those keen to take it further, harvested seeds can be shared through your sharing shed, if you have one, or even sold as a fundraiser to support future gardening projects.

A little seed-saving now can help sustain the garden for years to come!



Ngā hua | Our stories

Speed planting success yields new 300-tree ngāhere

Being good kaitiaki for the environment means being in it for the long-haul and taking an intergenerational view. But that doesn't mean progress has to be slow. Far from it. It all depends on who you know!

On the outskirts of Ngāruawāhia, a piece of land at the intersection of the Waingarō and Hakarimata Roads had become something of an eyesore and dumping ground, overrun with blackberry and convolvulus.

Last year, Teresa Lange from Waikato District Council and Wayne Bennett from the ecological restoration organisation Forest Flora led a planting day with the help of classes from Horsham Downs to restore the run-down enclave.

This year, they were back with support from Enviroschools, two teachers and 10 keen students from Ngāruawāhia Primary. It's hard mahi planting 300 trees, but the tamariki learned a valuable lesson in working smart that day. With Wayne and his post hole borer leading the charge, they were done and dusted in just 40 minutes!

Assistant Principal Kim Rangihika said: "Our tamariki were stoked to have had the opportunity to contribute to the ngāhere beside the Mangarata stream. This was a spot that they often passed by without taking much notice.

"They now reflect on this place as being special because they are part of its development. The learning here has ignited an interest to develop ngāhere spaces around our own kura too."



Time to tackle waste in Thames



Reducing waste is easier said than done, especially when we don't have clear sight of where it's coming from. But Thames High was up to the challenge and ready to turn the tides.

A comprehensive waste audit was undertaken in Term 3 with the support of Enviroschools and local community recycling and resource recovery facility the Seagull Centre.

When the results were presented to the school board early in Term 4, the need to take action and avenues for change became clear.

They found over 50 per cent of the waste going into landfill was food waste, with much of the remaining waste coming from the packaging for school lunches.

The board supported the following actions.

1. Activate a school wide discussion on waste streams and initiate a student-led response to reduce them.
2. Research options to convert organic waste into compost.
3. Develop a circular approach to waste stewardship.
4. Research ways the lunch in schools programme could operate that will lead to a reduction in the waste created.

The 2025 Enviroleaders are excited about carrying on this project with the help of the Student Volunteer Army. They'll continue planning with the support of their Enviroschools facilitator, and a Service and Environmental action plan will be presented to staff and the senior leadership team at the start of the school year.

An unexpected journey



“Where our hearts truly lie is in peace and quiet, and good tilled earth. For all Hobbits share a love of things that grow.”

The words of Bilbo Baggins encapsulate the enlightened environmentalism at the core Tolkien’s work. There were few places more fitting, then, to then to absorb the wisdom of nourishing the soil and caring for the nature than the rolling green hills of the Shire. And the Matamata Intermediate Envirogroup was quite ready for the adventure.

Hosted by the team at Hobbiton, their unexpected journey started with a magical tour of the movie set. The group then learned composting tips that would have made Samwise Gamgee and his old Gaffer proud. And, in the spiritual home of a movie franchise that’s boosted New Zealand tourism by over 50 per cent and welcomes over 500,000 visitors a year, the team also had no shortage of wisdom to share about good waste management.

The Envirogroup’s happy fellowship returned from their journey with lots of new knowledge to help them implement a waste reduction plan in their own school. But, with the ink not yet dry on the final chapter of their story. It wasn’t long before some unexpected guests appeared at their school.

Hobbiton’s Sustainability Coordinator Lianne and Gardner Evie, paid them a special visit to run a fascinating follow-up workshop on soil health. Even the smallest person can change the course of the future. And the group were able to see firsthand how small changes and thoughtful decisions can help ensure, in the wise words of Gandalf, “Those who live after may have clean earth to till.”

He rauemi | Resource spotlight

If you’re planning to grow food this term – perhaps you’re thinking about joining this year’s Māra Kai Challenge, hint, hint – the Living Landscapes theme area is a fantastic resource.

It’s full of fun activities and ideas to help you create a thriving school garden while connecting to nature and sustainable food systems. There are also [great resources on growing kūmara](#), as well as this super [Padlet](#) by Facilitator Alex, that’s full of practical tips and inspiration.

Kūmara holds deep cultural significance in the Waikato region, with [traditions around kūmara growing, storage, and sharing reflecting values of kaitiakitanga, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga](#), making this a powerful learning opportunity for students.

Bright-eyed vision and bushy-tailed trouble

As a new Enviroschool, Ōhaupō School hit the ground running. After a whole syndicate discussion and some ‘Me in My Environment’ mapping activities, they established a keen interest in planting natives.

The timely offer of 100 natives from Restore Natives provided an opportunity for the students to identify and map out areas around the school for planting.

The discussions raised ideas to extend the existing ngāhere, fill in around the fence line of the fields, curb roadside noise on the junior side of the school and tidy up the gardens in front of the school office. During the session, ākonga also identified what native species would be suitable in this area, known for its peat lakes and sandy soils.

A few weeks later, the tamariki noticed some of the plants in the highly used ngāhere had been walked on by others. A solution they identified was to stake them, to give them support and make them more visible.

The students were also disappointed to see plants chewed right down or completely gone from around the fence line of their fields. On closer inspection, they found rabbit droppings, and discussed what they might do on their own farms to cull rabbits as well as what could be done on school property. Planting smelly plants such as rosemary or lavender and sprinkling with coffee grinds or blood and bone to deter them from getting close to the plants were offered up as solutions.

As well and trying to get on top of the rampant rabbits, staking the existing plants and keeping up with watering the plants under the eaves of the office, trapping was also identified as a next step. This would give the trees have a chance to grow and provide a habitat for native birds.

The students had already learnt about trapping while attending an environmental event at Mystery Creek with other schools and had nine student-made traps ready to deploy. They were interested to learn more about collecting data and recording their kills on TrapNZ and are keen to explore the idea of trapping in the nearby cemetery, which is beside the school.



Ngā ringa hāpai | Enviroschools Waikato facilitation team

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Left top: Benoir
Back row, left to right: Sara, Alex, Cami
Middle row, left to right: Michelle, Anna, Jenni
Front row, left to right: Rachael, Jo, Adrienne

Find out more

enviroschools.org.nz

Check out the great selection of national news, resources and ideas in the team area.

To register, head to 'team area login' and click 'register'.

Please note that you will need your school/centre's

MoE number to complete the registration process.

You can find this at educationcounts.govt.nz.



Waikato Enviroschools Facebook

facebook.com/groups/waikatoenviroschools

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

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

