



Department of
Education

Shaping the future

Caring for Country together

Our sustainability framework



Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which our students live and are educated throughout Western Australia.

Ngalang windang birdiya koorl nidja moorditj kwobidak boodja-k kaaratj-ak. Baalap kaaratj boodja-k dek-ngat marlak-ngat wer barna-k. Boodja yang nyin.

[Our old people walked this strong beautiful land caring for it. They cared for country, plants, bush, river and animals. Country gave life.]

[Extract from Welcome to Country by Coleen Sherratt, Noongar Elder]

Caring for Country is a central component of Aboriginal cultures – continuing to bring valuable knowledge and understanding based on deep, spiritual connection to the land. A sustainable relationship between people, their society, their activities and the environment is central to 'caring for country' – a concept which has helped Aboriginal people sustain a continuous culture over tens of thousands of years.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives to guide us towards a more sustainable future, for all.

We acknowledge and understand that Elders, parents, families and communities are the first educators of their children and we recognise and value the cultures and strengths that Aboriginal children bring to the classroom. Aboriginal people have a long tradition of teaching and learning through sharing their connections with country, community, language and culture, and through their oral histories, stories and lived experiences that are passed from generation to generation.

We recognise and value the learning that Aboriginal children bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom.

The word Aboriginal is taken to mean Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous. When referring to individuals, use the term Aboriginal person.

Images: Students from Coolbinia Primary School studying in bushland and 'Caring for Country' with guidance and support from teacher/cross-curriculum leader, Dr Elaine Lewis, and Noongar Elder, Neville Collard – 'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' in action.

This material is available on request in appropriate alternative formats.



Minister's message

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' will play an important role in supporting a healthy, liveable environment to contribute to creating a fair, inclusive society for the future of our students and staff.

The Department of Education is a critical part of Western Australia's social fabric, and a major contributor to the State's prosperity and wellbeing.

As the State's largest employer and a major influencer of young people, we have a responsibility to support sustainability and promote sustainable patterns of living.

Our students have told us that they expect us to hold sustainability as a consideration in everything we do. 'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' has been designed with this in mind through consultation with staff, school communities as well as representatives from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, the Water Corporation, Energy Policy WA and Department of Finance.

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' complements and supports the McGowan Labor Government's Western Australian Climate Change Policy and initiatives such as the Schools Clean Energy Technology package, the Virtual Power Plants pilot project, and Solar Schools Program.

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' outlines our commitment to the development and implementation of practices that contribute to positive outcomes for sustainability, now and into the future.



Sue Ellery MLC
Minister for Education and Training

Director General's message

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' responds to our students' voices, to take action on sustainability.

In shaping the future through education, we are one of the most important influencers of future generations. We have the power, and the responsibility, to effect positive change and take care of the world our students will live their lives in.

The message we hear from our students, time and time again, is that they are concerned about climate change, species extinction, social justice and the future of our planet – and they want us to do more to ensure it is a healthy place for all, now and into the future.

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' complements and supports our Sustainable Schools WA initiative, which is mapped to and reflective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and it also supports implementation of the Western Australian Curriculum.

We already do a great many things across our schools and system to promote and embed sustainability – across our curriculum, operations and infrastructure – this document builds on that strength.

'Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework' is a starting point for continuous reflection and improvement and I am confident that it will propel us forward to a more sustainable future.



Lisa Rodgers
Director General



Sustainability statement

For us, sustainability is central to our schools, regional and central services – it is all about caring for each other and the country we live in – for the benefit of our students and our communities, and in everything we do.

The framework will assist us to:

Internally

Align

Bring together current sustainability activities under a unifying strategic narrative.

Embed

Build in better practice ideas from across Western Australia and other jurisdictions.

Apply

Be relevant at both a school and system level.

Inspire

Establish a powerful narrative and focus for sustainability across the organisation.

Measure

Define clear areas of focus that can be translated into reportable actions as part of overall State Government targets.

Externally

Comply with whole-of-government policy requirements and priorities including achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, the WA Waste Strategy 2030, Climate Change Policy and Waterwise Perth.

Support the Department's sustainability related reporting obligations

For example: The Department's mandatory reporting to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation on waste collection, disposal, recovery and management, under the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Regulations 2008.

Align with state-wide sustainability goals in other Western Australian Government authorities

For example: Energy Policy WA, focusing on sustainable energy sources and sustainability-driven education programs.

"As young people who are going to be growing up and living in the society that is going to be affected by these types of things [climate change, species extinction], it's really for us to know how we can help."

– Student, John Curtin College of the Arts

Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework

This provides the structure that will guide our thinking, actions and decision making on sustainability.

The framework operates across three levels – why, what, and how – connecting the central motivation and moral purpose of sustainability with the activities of the Department, and the tangible actions required to enact change.

The 'Why'

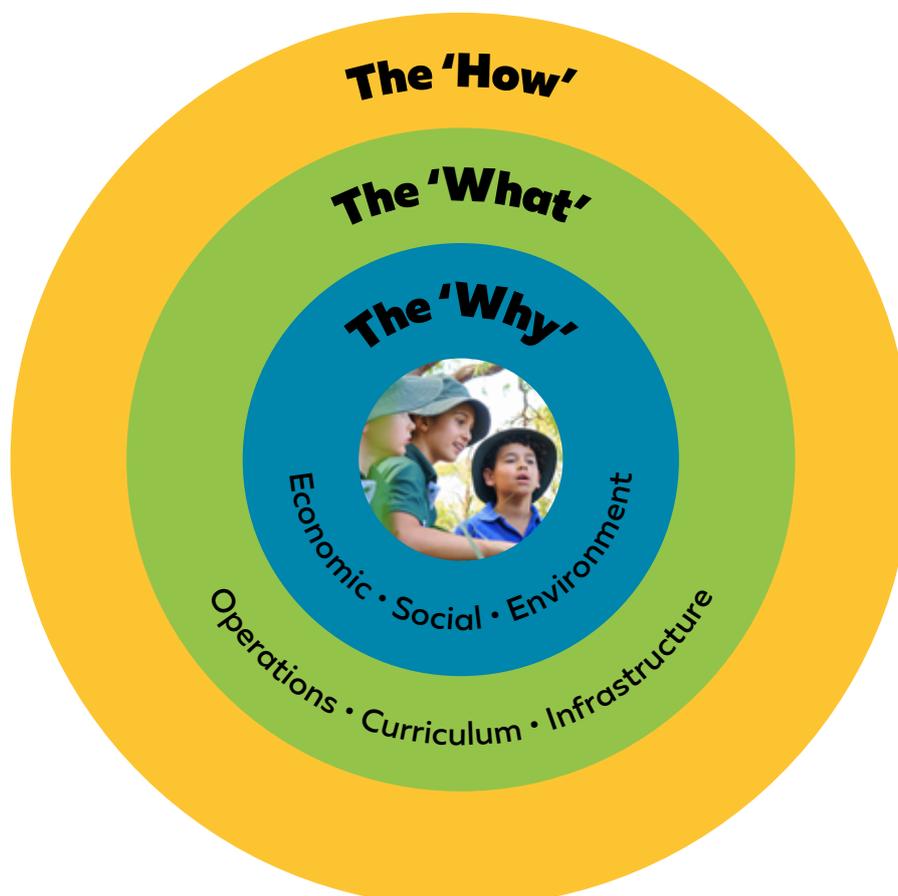
This is at the core of the framework and guides thinking around sustainability strategies and initiatives. It provides a vision and principles, across economic, social/cultural and environmental sustainability that everyone across the Department can relate to and contribute to.

The 'What'

This defines three 'focus areas' for the framework – curriculum, infrastructure, and operations – based on our key activities. These focus areas provide entry points into sustainability for different people and parts of the organisation, and a breadth of activity across the Department.

The 'How'

This guides decision-making by providing and outlining the detailed policies, procedures, processes and supports to deliver the sustainability objectives. This level of the framework will continue to be actively developed in implementation, with new materials and initiatives added and expanded over time.



The 'Why'

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defines sustainability as: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This is not a new idea in Western Australia. It is a central component of the concept of 'Caring for Country' which has sat at the heart of Aboriginal cultures for tens of thousands of years.

Caring for Country manifests in different ways for different people, and is far more than simply 'looking after land'. It reflects a mutual relationship between people and where they live, encompassing economic, social/cultural and environmental aspects that all need to be sustained for the wellbeing of people, and the wellbeing of the world. This is the 'Why' of our sustainability framework.

The statements below draw on this context namely the privileging of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing to understand the concept of sustainability and define the outcomes and behaviours we strive to achieve.

Environmental

We actively protect and conserve our natural environment, so that it's respected and maintained for all of us, and for generations to come.

Caring for Country means that we actively work to understand, and reduce our negative impact on, the natural environment, and help others to do the same.

Social

We respect and sustain a diversity of voices, and contribute together to a society that promotes the wellbeing and participation of all its citizens.

Social sustainability includes listening to each other and learning what people need to thrive - in the places where we live, work and learn - and we prioritise actions that ensure those needs are met.

Economic

We care for and manage our resources responsibly, so that current and future generations have what they need to grow and flourish.

Economic sustainability means we invest in things that will support long-term economic growth without negatively impacting the current community and future generations.

"Learning about sustainability has given me a broader view on how I am impacting the school/home environment and the world."

– Student, Southern River College



The 'What'

We support sustainability through three focus areas: curriculum, operations, and infrastructure.

The three focus areas form the foundation of what sustainability practically means within the Department. Curriculum, infrastructure, and operations sit across all areas, including schools, regional and central services, and are the main paths for building sustainability across the organisation.

Curriculum

We work collaboratively with our students, teachers and schools to bring knowledge of sustainability principles together with practical behaviours, to integrate into everyday lives.

Curriculum includes student learning outcomes, classroom supports, whole-school approaches to sustainability, and system wide support for teachers and schools to integrate sustainability into curriculum and classroom practice.

Integration of sustainability into curriculum will have a broad range of social and environmental outcomes including increased student and community engagement, improved local biodiversity and a better understanding of local history, cultures and languages.

Infrastructure

We positively influence others by firmly upholding sustainability principles in the planning and development of new and existing infrastructure. We draw on Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives to inform the design of new and existing infrastructure.

It includes the thoughtful planning, design, and building of sustainable infrastructure, as well as the commissioning of services that offer sustainable choices over cheaper, less sustainable options.

Improving the sustainability of infrastructure should have economic and environmental benefits, for example low energy, low water, and low waste schools cost less to operate.

Operations

We are committed to the effective use and management of sustainable materials across our operational activities.

Operations includes the use of sustainable methods and management practices to support day-to-day water and energy consumption, avoidance and disposal of waste, the maintenance of grounds, and the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

Improving the sustainability of operations should have direct economic and environmental impacts, for example through reducing the production of waste.

"The most fun part about it is being able to work together with your classmates."

– Student, John Curtin College of the Arts



The 'How'

In each of our focus areas, we support practical action with a range of initiatives and supporting materials – this is 'How' sustainability will work in action.

The 'How' is directly linked with the focus areas of the 'What' and is the area that will most evolve and grow over time.

Each focus area of curriculum, operations and infrastructure contains sub-categories based on the kinds of work undertaken and how these initiatives align.

These initiatives will include new ideas and additions as well as existing initiatives, unified under one framework. Initiatives can be added, extended, removed or changed – they are not set in stone within this document, but a growing and evolving reflection of the Department's ongoing commitment to sustainability.

"What we have learnt [about sustainability] in school has helped us be more conscious of what we do outside of school."

– Student, Southern River College

Examples of sustainability initiatives already in action include:

Curriculum

Many schools embrace education for sustainability through student-driven inquiry processes. This approach supports action-based teaching and learning for sustainability that builds personal and social competence whilst supporting social and emotional wellbeing.

Infrastructure

Passive solar design principles have played a part in the construction of many new schools, minimising environmental impact, and increasing economic sustainability through lowered ongoing power use.

Many new schools now connect to the local historical and cultural values of the community, with language, artworks and for example six seasons gardens on country reflecting this.

Operations

Many schools have implemented sustainable replacement policies, where blown or broken lights are replaced with energy-efficient LEDs, reducing cost and environmental impact.

Schools are increasingly working with their gardening staff to support various aspects of curriculum implementation for example productive food gardens, native bushland areas.

Ten schools have been identified to be established as virtual power plants, deriving their energy from renewable sources as well as producing renewable energy that can be shared with their local communities.

Focus areas and associated principles

Meeting these principles with actions and defined and measurable outcomes is everybody's responsibility.

Curriculum

Student

We empower students with the knowledge, skills and understandings to integrate sustainability practices in their lives.

Classroom

We use sustainability as a critically important context for teaching and learning, empowering our students with a transformative, action-based education approach.

Schools

We take a whole-of-school approach to education for sustainability and the integration and innovation of sustainability practices and processes. Schools are supported to develop locally relevant sustainability action plans.

System

We unify the education system by recognising and sharing sustainability practices and achievements.

Infrastructure

Plan

We uphold social/cultural and environmental sustainability in the planning of new infrastructure.

Design

We actively integrate sustainability design principles and culturally responsive approaches into the design of new infrastructure.

Build

We demonstrate sustainable construction methods in the building of new infrastructure.

Commission

We select sustainable choices with long-term benefits over short-term savings when commissioning new infrastructure.

Operations

Natural environment / Country

We endeavour to understand our local natural environment including school grounds and work to conserve and enhance the environmental and social values of these areas.

Water

We optimise the use of water through thoughtful planning and practices that reflect sustainability such as use of native, 'water wise' plants and hydro zoning.

Energy

We prioritise and pursue initiatives that reduce our energy footprint.

Waste

We actively support and enable initiatives that avoid waste, recover more resources and protect the environment.

Maintenance

We pursue the sustainable maintenance of buildings by building internal capability and adopting sustainable methods

"We couldn't survive without the trees.
They are our future."

– Student, Westminster Primary School



Caring for Country together: roadmap

Implementation is everybody's responsibility.

Successful achievement requires unified action by all – staff, students, and school communities.

This roadmap will guide action on Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework and is a tool for individuals, school communities and the Department:

1. to assess the sustainability initiatives they are currently undertaking
2. to have shared conversations to identify what they need to do next to enhance their impact.

Emerging	Developing Work in progress	Established Good practice common	Embedded Culture of best practice
Curriculum – We work collaboratively with our students, teachers and school communities to bring knowledge of sustainability principles together with practical behaviours, to integrate into everyday lives.			
<p>Student Students learn about sustainability, but on an ad hoc basis.</p> <p>Classroom Teachers consider sustainability when delivering the curriculum.</p> <p>Schools Implementation of education for sustainability is fragmented and often driven by 'champions'.</p> <p>System Sustainability initiatives are present at a system level, but require greater engagement by schools.</p>	<p>Student Students learn about sustainability through meaningful context provided in teaching and learning programs.</p> <p>Classroom Teachers look to integrate the sustainability cross-curriculum priority in teaching and learning programs, where appropriate.</p> <p>Schools Each teacher acknowledges the part they can play in supporting education for sustainability as part of a whole-school approach.</p> <p>System Ongoing and more concerted efforts are made to support schools to engage with whole-school planning frameworks specifically Sustainable Schools WA, and projects such as Two-way Science.</p>	<p>Student Students are provided opportunities to build knowledge on sustainability and engage in transformative education practices.</p> <p>Classroom Classrooms adopt consistent approaches to education for sustainability.</p> <p>Schools School staff integrate sustainability initiatives with curriculum.</p> <p>System Coordinated system-wide professional learning for staff, teachers and principals.</p>	<p>Student Students are provided with significant, ongoing opportunities to learn about and take action for sustainability.</p> <p>Classroom Teachers provide culturally responsive, practical, action-based 'two way' learning opportunities in the classroom.</p> <p>Schools Whole-school sustainability plans support and drive curriculum delivery.</p> <p>System Network collaboration supports improvement in integrating sustainability, and sharing and weaving knowledge systems into schools.</p>
Infrastructure – We positively influence others by firmly upholding sustainability principles in the planning and development of new and existing infrastructure.			
<p>Plan Limited consideration of sustainability in the planning of new infrastructure.</p> <p>Design Design is focused on function and efficiency only, and only considers sustainability if convenient.</p> <p>Build The building of new infrastructure rarely, if ever, implements sustainable construction methods.</p> <p>Commission The sustainability practices of contracted service providers are unclear or non-existent.</p>	<p>Plan Sustainability is considered in infrastructure planning, but is compliance-driven or ad hoc.</p> <p>Design New infrastructure is designed with elements of sustainability in mind, but is secondary to cost efficiency.</p> <p>Build Sustainable construction methods are considered, but not always prioritised when building.</p> <p>Commission Sustainability is a consideration when commissioning new infrastructure.</p>	<p>Plan Sustainable design is a guiding feature in the planning of new infrastructure.</p> <p>Design Thoughtful design of infrastructure that supports sustainability principles in operations.</p> <p>Build Sustainable construction methods are often used in the building of new infrastructure.</p> <p>Commission Providers are strongly encouraged to consider sustainability practices in order to be contracted.</p>	<p>Plan Social/cultural, environmental and economic sustainability are core to the planning of new infrastructure.</p> <p>Design Sustainable design principles are seamlessly integrated into the design of new infrastructure.</p> <p>Build The construction of new infrastructure is underpinned by sustainability action plans.</p> <p>Commission Sustainability and long-term benefits are prioritised when commissioning new infrastructure.</p>
Operations – We are committed to applying sustainability principles in the use and management of materials across our operational activities.			
<p>Water Approaches to saving water across Department sites are either informal or poorly implemented.</p> <p>Energy Energy consumption is an afterthought or secondary consideration in operations.</p> <p>Waste Waste management approaches rely primarily on goodwill, or are not pursued.</p> <p>Maintenance Little to no knowledge or implementation of sustainable maintenance practices.</p> <p>Natural environment / Country Little or no remnant vegetation exists on the site. Minimal native plants and animals are present.</p>	<p>Water Clear approach to saving water across Department sites, but done so in isolation from planning processes.</p> <p>Energy Opportunities to improve energy efficiency are considered, but lack clarity of implementation</p> <p>Waste Coordination and management of resources that are used and purchased to reduce waste.</p> <p>Maintenance Sustainable maintenance practices are implemented, but on an ad hoc or inconsistent basis.</p> <p>Natural environment / Country Some remnant vegetation exists on site and/or native plants have been established. Some native animals are present.</p>	<p>Water Water-saving approaches are drawn on across all relevant operations.</p> <p>Energy Well-defined energy reduction initiatives are incentivised or supported.</p> <p>Waste Implementation of specific waste reduction initiatives across all operations.</p> <p>Maintenance Sustainability is a central consideration of site managers including economic and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Natural environment / Country Some remnant vegetation exists on site and significant re-vegetation with native plants has taken place. A reasonable amount of native animals are present.</p>	<p>Water The use of water is optimised across Department sites through thoughtful planning and consideration of sustainability in processes and methods.</p> <p>Energy Initiatives that reduce the energy footprint are prioritised and pursued in all operations.</p> <p>Waste Initiatives to avoid waste, recover more resources and protect the environment are actively supported.</p> <p>Maintenance Sustainability considerations drive the maintenance of buildings and school grounds.</p> <p>Natural environment / Country Significant amount of remnant vegetation exists on site, complemented by native plants being established. A significant amount of native animals are present.</p>

Shaping the future

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