



Department of
Education

Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework

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1. Framework

1.1 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.

1.2 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.

This framework document is an amended version of the Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework which is available in PDF format [here](#).

1.3 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.

1.4 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.

1.5 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.

Guidance

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.

1.6 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.

1.7 Related documents

[Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030](#)

[Kep Katitjin – Gabi Kaadadjan – Waterwise Perth action plan 3](#)

[WA's Plan for Plastics](#)

[Climate Adaptation Strategy](#)

1.8 Related Policies

[Western Australian Climate Change Policy](#)

1.9 Supporting content

[Caring for Country together – our sustainability framework \(staff only\)](#)

2. Contact information

Framework manager:

Principal Consultant (Sustainability)
Infrastructure Strategy and Planning

Framework contact:

Department of Education
151 Royal Street
East Perth WA 6004

(08) 9264 4342

sustainability.support@education.wa.edu.au

3. Appendices

Appendix A: [Sustainability Framework A3 Roadmap](#) (PDF file - 151.2kB)

4. More information

Supporting content
