

Submission to Draft Long Term Plan Waitomo District Council 2015-25

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Recognising your support for the Enviroschools Programme

We would like to acknowledge Waitomo District Council (WDC) for supporting young people in your region to be part of the Enviroschools network since 2002.

The Enviroschools Programme is a nationwide action-based education programme where young people plan, design and implement sustainability projects and become catalysts for change in their communities. Enviroschools was originally developed in the late 1990's by councils in Waikato as a non-regulatory tool and has now been adopted by 51 councils, including most of the larger councils and two-thirds of the total sector.

The programme is managed nationally by Toimata Foundation (a charitable trust). During April 2015 the name of our organisation changed from The Enviroschools Foundation to Toimata Foundation. The two programmes currently supported by the Foundation, Te Aho Tū Roa and Enviroschools, are retaining their current names, logos and identities. We wrote to the Mayor/Chair and Chief Executive of all our partner councils on the 20th April with more information about this change.

Toimata Foundation has funding from the Ministry for the Environment and works closely with the Department of Conservation. Regional implementation of Enviroschools is through partnerships with Local Government and other community agencies. This multi-sector collaboration has enabled nearly 1,000 schools and early childhood education (ECE) centres to now be involved – representing 30% of the school sector and 5% of the large early childhood sector. Locally, 28% of Waitomo District schools are part of the Enviroschools network.

This submission encourages WDC to maintain its involvement in Enviroschools along with the other regional partner agencies – Waikato Regional Council, Hamilton City Council, all district councils in the region – South Waikato, Thames-Coromandel, Taupo, Waipa, Hauraki, Matamata-Piako, Waikato, as well as Veolia Water and Kindergartens Waikato.

Highlights from recent programme evaluation

Toimata Foundation has been working with a team of external evaluators to quantify the actions undertaken and record the beneficial outcomes of the programme observed by schools and ECE participating in Enviroschools. In late 2014 a nationwide survey of all Enviroschools was conducted as part of the evaluation process. The survey is very robust, with a 73% response rate and highlights include:

- *Wide participation* - Schools were equally able to participate in the Enviroschools Programme across all deciles, sectors and regions.
- *All age groups (early childhood, primary and secondary) are taking environmental action* – across a wide variety of areas including waste, water, biodiversity, food production, energy and eco-building.
- *Community collaboration*- Enviroschools fosters significant community collaboration, creating leadership pathways for students and real connections to families, outside agencies and communities.
- *Zero Waste* – Almost all Enviroschools (100%)¹ are taking a range of actions to reduce waste.
- *Food production* – Most Enviroschools (97%) are growing and harvesting produce from their gardens/trees for cooking, selling and gifting.

¹ Due to rounding - of 688 schools surveyed, 686 are taking actions to reduce waste.

- *Biodiversity projects are well developed, with clear links to community* – 96% of respondents had biodiversity projects with 86,859 trees planted in 2014 (86% of which were native trees).
- *Successful water projects* – Three quarters of Enviroschools (75%) are undertaking a range of actions for water quality and conservation, including 19,264 meters of riparian planting in 2014.
- *Tackling energy usage* – Just over two-thirds of Enviroschools (69%) are involved in energy projects, including actions for sustainable transport (47%) and energy conservation actions (34%).
- *Enviroschools is contributing to a range of other outcomes* including citizenship, health, cultural understanding, motivated learners and community participation.
- *Depth of practice is related to the extent of outcomes* - Results showed that the depth of practice increases with the length of time a school or ECE centre is involved in Enviroschools. Nearly two thirds of participating schools/centres (62%) report ‘quite well developed’ or ‘deep embedded’ practice. Further, the survey results show a clear link between depth of practice and the extent to which the programme is contributing to outcomes. This reinforces the value of the long-term approach of the Enviroschools Programme.

“The strength of Enviroschools lies in the collaborations and multiple relationships that have been established and continue to be nurtured through its model of facilitated, networked and distributed leadership, engaging communities, schools and other stakeholders in action aimed at creating sustainable communities.” *The evaluators, Kinnect Group*

Conclusion

The Enviroschools Programme has a proven track record of being an effective approach for engaging schools and communities in environmental and social action.

With the backbone support of Toimata Foundation, and a network of councils around the country, the programme catalyses learning and action among thousands of young people, their families and communities from early childhood to secondary school. By connecting and coordinating resources and people, openly building and sharing knowledge across communities, widespread action is enabled on a broad scale.

As a funder, the partnership with Enviroschools provides WDC with multiple points of leverage across the Waitomo community, extending the possible impact of its funding beyond what might be expected with a more traditional approach.