

# War on Waste: The Next Generation of Waste Warriors

ABC Great Southern

By Lisa Morrison



**Photo:** Mt Manypeaks Primary School student Caleb Haua, 11, in the greenhouse students built.  
(ABC Great Southern: Lisa Morrison)

[Map: Manypeaks 6328](#)

A tiny school in regional Western Australia has proven small but mighty waste warriors.

Mt Manypeaks Primary School, 40 kilometres east of Albany, has just 28 remarkably eco-conscious students.

The accredited Waste Wise school has radically reduced its contribution to landfill by an impressive 83 per cent since 2014.

Three years ago, school gardener John Wills was making two trips to the tip each week to dump 720 litres of waste — a total of 28,000 litres each school year.

Fast forward to 2017 and Mr Wills makes one trip a fortnight with a 240-litre bin — just 4,800 litres each school year.

**How did they do it?**



**Photo:** Mt Manypeaks Primary School students Sigga Sanchez, 9, and Hamish Walmsley, 10, with the paper compost bin. (ABC Great Southern: Lisa Morrison)

In 2014, Mt Manypeaks Primary School received a \$2,000 Waste Authority WA grant through the Waste Wise Schools Program.

The statewide program aims to reduce landfill generated by schools and teaching children environmental values.

Students methodically audited every item in their rubbish bins, then tackled ways to limit what they threw away.

All the paper produced in the two classrooms is shredded and used as compost in the vegetable garden, which Mr Wills built entirely from recycled materials.

Herbs sprout from the door of a recycled staff room fridge.

Worm farms in the fridge body and an old bathtub thrive on the students' food scraps.

Students propagate seedlings in a greenhouse made from more than 200 recycled plastic bottles.

They are responsible for tending to the plants and harvesting the produce.



**Photo:** Mt Manypeaks Primary School student Tom Geddes, 11, tends to the worm farm in an old bathtub. (ABC Great Southern: Lisa Morrison)

Every week, the students cook a meal using their fresh, seasonal bounty in an old storage room that has been transformed into a kitchen.

Kitchen scraps return to the garden's compost bins.

School Council chairwoman Laura Bird said the Plot to Plate to Plot program taught students double plastic packaging at supermarkets was unnecessary.

"It really highlighted to the children that you don't have to have all the packaging that you buy from supermarkets," she said.

"To make food, you can actually grow it in its own skin. It doesn't need an extra layer of plastic and Styrofoam trays."

Even the music program incorporates recycled materials, with students learning to play a marimba made from recycled timber and PVC pipe.

**Reduce, reuse, recycle**



**Photo:** Mt Manypeaks Primary School student Monique Anderson, 9, adds some used batteries to the recycling station. (ABC Great Southern: Lisa Morrison)

A program called Trash-Free Tuesdays has had a big impact.

"We encourage all the students to come to school with no waste in their lunchbox," Ms Bird said.

"What we have found is now instead of just doing Trash-Free Tuesday, most days of the week they will have trash-free lunchboxes, which is a great result."

Year 6 student Fynn Kelleher-Bird said minimising plastic pollution was important for wildlife conservation.

"It feels good to know we are helping to keep the animals from not dying," he said.

Year 5 student Hamish Walmsley said other schools could do what Mt Manypeaks had achieved.

"It is quite easy because then you get so used to it that it becomes natural," he said.

Batteries are recycled and the school is a collection point for car and farm machinery batteries from around the region.

**Sowing the seeds of sustainability**



**Photo:** Mt Manypeaks Primary School students Mitch Geddes, 10, Kesia Kelleher-Bird, 9, and Fynn Kelleher-Bird, 10, play a marimba made from recycled PVC pipe and timber. (ABC Great Southern: Lisa Morrison)

Ms Bird hopes the school's strong sustainability focus will spread beyond the close-knit farming community, which has a population of 387 people.

"I know our kids from Mt Manypeaks will all go into different high schools," she said.

"What we have been trying to instil in Mt Manypeaks is really good behaviour and then they can be role models for their peers when they get older."

Principal Phillip Rowett said environmental education was embedded in the school's ethos.

"Some schools are known for sports programs or music programs," he said.

"What we do well is sustainability and being waste wise.

"We don't feel like we are doing anything special. We are just a little school doing our little bit for the planet."