

CASE STUDY

Newcastle Middle School NSW

School Profile

Newcastle Middle School in NSW caters for the needs of middle year students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. It has been a middle school since early 2012, and there are 42 students enrolled in years 5 to 8.

Why Participate?

Planet Ark's Schools Recycle Right Challenge was the perfect vehicle for the school to work towards its sustainability aims:

- ♻️ To develop staff and student knowledge that sustainability is a cross-curriculum priority relevant to all subject areas;
- ♻️ To increase staff awareness of ways to reuse materials and resources creatively for projects in a variety of Key Learning Areas; and
- ♻️ To reduce the amount of school waste going to landfill.

Implementing Activities

All 7 classes pledged to participate and were involved in recycling activities during the 6 week Challenge period. The weekly updates from Planet Ark helped keep the school on track to achieve its target of increasing recycling. The students reused a variety of materials to make new products, and reduced the amount of waste generated by the school. Activities included:

- ♻️ A lunch box waste audit (see the Waste-Free Lunch Challenge Activities – Teachers' Notes section of Planet Ark's *The Waste-Free Lunch Challenge guide** or Planet Ark's Lesson Plan, *Recycling Right at Lunch**);



- ♻️ A recycling lesson on reducing food and packaging waste for 2 classes (see Planet Ark's Lesson Plan, *Recycling Right With Packaging**)
- ♻️ Making 'shakers', musical instruments made from reused plastic bottles and rice (see the 'Wastruments' section of Planet Ark's *Recycled Arts and Crafts Guide**);
- ♻️ Using toilet rolls and strawberry punnets as mini greenhouses to grow seedlings for the school vegetable garden. When the mini green houses were no longer needed, they were cleaned and put in the recycling bin;

- ♻️ Using old towels to make sewn swimming bags;
- ♻️ Making hand weights from 2 litre milk containers for the daily fitness program;
- ♻️ Using a variety of empty food containers in a 3D maths lesson.

Achievements

Recycling and sustainability is now taught as part of the school curriculum. It is becoming part of the school culture, and staff share reuse and recycling ideas at meetings. Some of the successful outcomes of the Schools Recycle Right Challenge activities include:

- ♻️ The setting up of recycling protocols for paper, cardboard, glass jars, and cans in all classes, offices and staffrooms (see Planet Ark's *How To Set Up A Recycling System: A School's Guide* for a step-by-step approach);
- ♻️ The setting up of recycling protocols for e-waste, batteries and food scraps using a worm farm (see the Planet Ark video *Costa's Guide to Organics for Schools*);
- ♻️ A doubling of materials recycled each fortnight;
- ♻️ A reduction in items going to landfill; and
- ♻️ An increase in reuse and recycling at school.



Students and teachers had a lot of fun and enjoyed the diversity of activities. Students became very involved in the school's recycling system, with reuse and recycling being incorporated into a wide variety of subject areas.

Challenges

A number of strategies kept the Schools Recycle Right Challenge activities on track over 6 weeks. These included planning activities well in advance; providing positive feedback to classes that started early; gaining a pledge to participate from each class; sharing ideas and successes via an interactive smartboard, the school newsletter and staff meetings.

Recommendations for other schools

For schools that are yet to participate in the Schools Recycle Right Challenge, Newcastle Middle School staff recommend starting small and encouraging all classes to brainstorm ideas that the school can implement. Ideas and activities can even have a variety of themes such as energy, waste and water. And of course, always remember to celebrate success!

*To gain access to Planet Ark's Schools Recycle Right Challenge resources and become part of a national program to help kids learn about sustainability and the environmental benefits of recycling, you simply need to register your school at SchoolsRecycle.PlanetArk.org/involved