

# Waikato ENVIROSCHOOLS

Hōtoke 2026 edition

## He mihi

Welcome to the Waikato Enviroschools newsletter.

As winter approaches and we look forward to celebrating Matariki, it's a natural time to reflect on your Enviroschools journey, and plan ahead. This edition shares inspiring stories from around the region to support new ideas as you set intentions for the next 12 months.

Winter also signals the start of tree-planting season. Whether you're planting at school, through Trees for Survival, or at a local event, we wish you a successful planting season.

Our first Enviroschools funding round for the year has now closed, and we're looking forward to seeing projects take shape in the coming months.

The next funding round opens on 25 August – so now is a great time to start preparing. Check in with your facilitator if you'd like support.

We hope you enjoy this edition. Feel free to share it with colleagues who may be interested.

Ngā mihi,

The Enviroschools team



## Tā tātou mahi | What we do

Enviroschools is a nationwide programme supported by the Toimata Foundation and a large network of regional partners, like us here at Waikato Regional Council.

It helps support early childhood centres and schools on their long-term sustainability journeys, teaching a generation of young people to value and nurture their natural environment.

*Our vision is to create a healthy, peaceful, sustainable world through learning and taking action together.*



**14 regional partners**

**222 Enviroschools**

**50  
ECE centres**

**172  
schools**

**55,700  
tamariki and students**

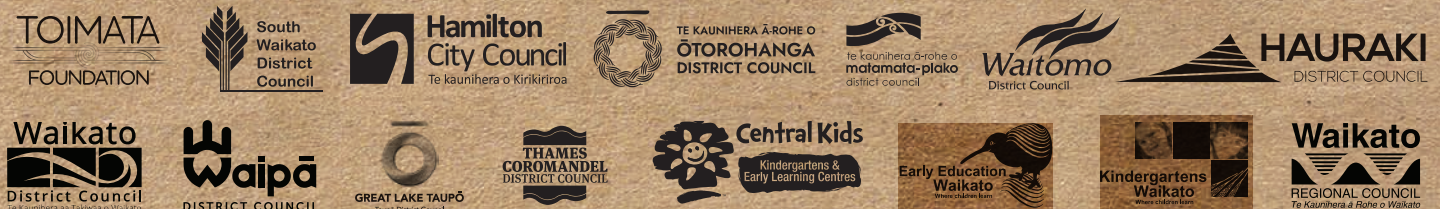
**15% of early childhood  
61% of primary and intermediate**

**58% of secondary  
69% of composite and other**

**3 collaborators**



Waikato Enviroschools acknowledge our funding partners. Their ongoing input and funding is essential to the success of the Enviroschool programme throughout our region.



# Ngā kaupapa e haere ake nei | Opportunities

The events and opportunities below are open to all Enviroschools across the Waikato region. Additional local events and opportunities will also be available from time to time. Your facilitator will be in touch to discuss these directly.

## For students

### The Great Kiwi Earthworm Survey

**June to September 2026**

The Great Kiwi Earthworm Survey is on! Students can take part from anywhere they've got permission to dig a small hole.

Earthworms are useful indicators of soil health, and this project aims to capture information on earthworm abundance and species distribution throughout New Zealand.

[Find out more.](#)

### Rotopiko (Serpentine Lake) planting day

**Thursday, 18 June, 10am–2pm**

Join us for a fun day at Rotopiko. Students will enjoy exploring the area, taking part in environmental games and activities, and discovering the wetland trail.

Bring your lunch, gardening gloves and a curious and can-do attitude.

[Register here.](#)

### Greening Taupō Day

**Thursday, 4 June, Tauhara Road (across the road from the BP), 10am–2pm**

Celebrate Arbor Day at Greening Taupō by planting native trees, participating in free activities and enjoying a sausage sizzle or soup.

Special guests will be there entertain and educate, along with a huge range of conservation experts and local businesses running free fun activities.

The planting is part of the long-term vision: creating native corridors into town that bring wildlife to urban Taupō and link up the remaining stands of native bush.

[Find out more.](#)

### Art in Nature Children's Day

**Wednesday, 16 September, Waitakaruru Sculpture Park, Tauwhare**

We're bringing together students and community experts to celebrate and be inspired in nature through creativity and action.

[Register here.](#)

Waitakaruru Sculpture Park have "Kids Go Free" for the Term 2 Holidays – wander the two kilometre art in nature trail amongst a landscape of ponds, cliffs, gardens, trees sculpture and installations.

### Enviroleaders Summit (for secondary students)

**Wednesday, 12 August**

Following a successful two-day summit in April, secondary enviroleaders will have the opportunity to connect back with each other and the environment.

This action-based, leadership skills day at [The Fairfield Project](#), Fairfield College, is a great opportunity to regroup and build on inspiration and motivation levels to take action for the environment.

[Register here.](#)

## For teachers

### South Waikato Cluster Meeting

**Wednesday, 27 May, Tokoroa**

In Term 2, we'll be exploring one of our popular theme area resource books, *Water of Life*.

The session will include a range of interactive activities to help you understand how the books work, and to become familiar with some of the resources.

[Register here.](#)

### Nature Connection (Online)

**Thursday, 18 June, 3.15–4pm**

Following our Nature Connection Teacher Re-Energise at Forest Lake Primary in Term 1, we're starting a Nature Connection online cluster.

It's been set up to help teachers share and learn together, while developing ideas for nature connection opportunities with their students.

[Register here.](#)

### World Environment Day

**Friday, 5 June**

The focus for World Environment Day this year is a global call for climate action.

And, with Arbor Day also celebrated on 5 June, planting events near you can be a great way to contribute.

[Learn more about growing and planting trees.](#)

[Add your initiative to the global map.](#)

## Resource kits and programmes

### Check them out any time!

We have some excellent kits that can be borrowed to support learning outside the classroom.

- Waste Audit Kit
- Stream Study Kit
- Freshwater Detective Kit
- Kauri Protection Programme
- Freshwater Biosecurity Programme
- Marine Biosecurity Resource
- Nature Connection Kit

Get in touch with your facilitator to book any of these for 2026.

## Other opportunities from NZAEE

### Outdoor Classroom Day

**Thursday, 21 May**

Outdoor Classroom Day is a global movement to make time outdoors part of every child's day. In May and November, teachers take children outdoors to play and learn, which often this leads to more regular outdoor learning in the long run.

[Register here.](#)

### Tātaiao NZAEE National Conference

**Monday, 5 October – Wednesday, 7 October, Motu Moana Camp, Blockhouse Bay**

Join NZAEE in Auckland for their national conference.

[Find out more and register here.](#)

## Enviroschools website login

As the new school year begins you might have different staff members keen to access Enviroschools resources. With this in mind, here's a reminder of how to do so.

To access the Enviroschools 'Team Area' and some of the content on our Padlet, you'll need to [register here](#).

Multiple staff members from a school can register. Each person will just need a unique email address and username.

You will need to have access to your email and know your school/centre's MoE number to complete the registration process. (You can find your MoE number on the Education Counts website [educationcounts.govt.nz](http://educationcounts.govt.nz)).

If, during the registration process, the email doesn't arrive, please check your junk mail.

Once registered, you'll be able to login to the [Team Area](#) using the email or username you chose, and the password you created.

## He twhiri | Quick sustainability tips

Winter is a great time to prepare.

Before you know it, the soil will warm up and it'll be time to plant spring seedlings.

While your brassicas and other winter crops are doing their thing, use the downtime to get your garden ready for the months ahead.

Start with a soil check using the guidance from Healthy Soil, Healthy Plants, Healthy People to see how much life is in your soil.

Then take a few simple steps: mulch or cover bare beds, prune dormant trees, and arrange a fresh load of mulch now so it can start breaking down for summer.

You could also contact a local arborist to see if they'd be willing to support your school with a free mulch drop-off.



# CHECK, CLEAN, DRY POSTER CHALLENGE



See your students' amazing artwork showcased on signage near you!

We're giving students the opportunity to learn more about freshwater biosecurity and to win sought-after spots on Waikato River boat ramp signs.

The signs will be on display for the next five years, showcasing some of the best artwork rangatahi in our region can create.

The challenge is to convey check, clean, dry biosecurity messaging in the clearest and most creative ways possible.

An exciting range of biosecurity spot prizes will also be on offer, subject to local availability.

All entries must be in by 30 June 2026. Winners will be announced in Term 3.

The competition is open to all Waikato schools and kura.



Contact your EnviroSchools facilitator or email [waikatoenviroschools@waikatoregion.govt.nz](mailto:waikatoenviroschools@waikatoregion.govt.nz) for further details to enter your school or class today!

**Waikato**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL  
Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

## Ngā hua | Our stories

### Saint Patrick's zero waste journey

**Reported by Gypsy Taylor-Hewitt (Facilitator, Waipā and Hamilton)**

At Saint Patrick's, Te Awamutu, a quiet transformation is taking root – one that's less about rubbish bins and more about reimagining their place in nature.

Before the buzz of students returned for the year, teachers gathered for a teacher-only day, rolling up their sleeves to dig deep into one powerful idea: there is no waste in nature.

Through hands-on activities and meaningful conversations, staff sorted through waste, faced the stark truth of how long everyday items linger in our environment, and began planting the seeds of change.

What might have once been seen as "rubbish" became a starting point for innovation.

Pancake day was transformed into a zero-waste event, with recycling stations dotted around the school grounds that helped to divert waste and nurture better habits.

Next, the school will experiment with a bold idea: removing bins for a day and observing what happens. It's not about making a mess. It's about seeing how students manage their waste. They also plan to introduce new food waste bins, fill school newsletters with practical



waste-wise tips, and run fun competitions that inspire students to become kaitiaki (guardians) of their environment.

Leading the way will be the newly formed Enviro Team. Their vision includes creating a hot composting system, turning food scraps into rich, nourishing soil for the school gardens.

Families will be encouraged to bring their own plates and cups to school events. The school is also exploring ways to share food scraps with local whānau who have pigs, and to work with the local church to divert waste as a community.

Step by step, Saint Patrick's is cultivating a future where less is wasted and more is valued.

### Community brings forgotten space back to life

**Reported by Rachael Cheeseman (Facilitator, Waikato and Thames Coromandel)**

Behind Ōtaua School, a once-neglected dumping ground is being transformed into a thriving native ngahere and wetland.

The restoration has been driven by a strong partnership with Awaroa Ki Kariotahi Landcare, led by chair Willy Muir.

And, with the support of local organisations, volunteers and students, a forgotten space is being brought back to life.

Pest plants including moth plant, privet and pampas were cleared, along with rubbish and old materials.

The area was then fenced to protect new plantings. In spring, native trees and wetland species were carefully planted and nurtured through summer with shared water supplies, irrigation and ongoing weed control.

Support from the wider community has been vital. The local bowling club helped supply water during the dry months, a church group provided volunteers for planting days, and the plants themselves were supplied by PF Olsen. Local contractors also donated their time and expertise.

With all this collective effort, momentum quickly grew – and the landscape began to change.

Today, the site is more than a restoration project. For students, it has become a living classroom, where they learn about wetland



ecosystems, restoration and kaitiakitanga while caring for a space that benefits the wider community.

Future plans include creating walking tracks through the ngahere and extending restoration towards the nearby playcentre.

As Willy Muir puts it, "when people work together — people who know people who know people — projects gain momentum."

It's this ripple effect that has helped the Ōtaua ngahere flourish, transforming a neglected space into a place of learning, connection and biodiversity.

## Erosion risk meets extreme weather

**Reported by Alex Daniel (Facilitator, Waipā, Hamilton and Matamata-Piako)**

Concepts like erosion risk and river sedimentation can seem abstract – something normally confined to diagrams and classroom discussion.

But step into an erosion-prone landscape and those ideas quickly take on real meaning.

Visit after a major storm event, and the learning becomes immediate, vivid and impossible to ignore.

A Hamilton Boys' High School field trip to explore erosion in the foothills of Mt Pirongia had been scheduled months in advance for late February.

But less than a week before, the plan was nearly derailed when a local state of emergency was declared in the Waipā District.

Severe weather, including widespread heavy rainfall, had caused flooding, slips and disruption to roads and critical infrastructure.

Despite the challenging conditions, the trip went ahead following thorough health and safety checks, including confirmation that Department of Conservation tracks and local roads were open and safe.

For the Year 13 students, the learning began before they even stepped off the bus. As they travelled toward the extinct volcano, they spotted scars of exposed orange soil etched across the mountain-side – visible reminders of the recent storm's impact.

Suddenly, the in-class lessons from earlier in the term – covering erosion causes, risk mapping and mitigation strategies – felt far less theoretical.

Out in the field, Waikato Regional Council Soil and Land Scientist Tim Norris brought the science to life. Along the Karamu Walkway, he guided students through the processes of hill-slope erosion, pointing out real-world examples and explaining how different landscapes carry different levels of risk.

The group then moved to Kaniwhaniwha Reserve to examine stream ecology, before finishing at a long-term sediment monitoring site at the bottom of the catchment. Here, students tested water quality by measuring stream turbidity.

The results were striking. Compared with pre-storm readings, the water was noticeably murkier – laden with sediment washed downstream by flash floods and slips.

The unusually high sediment load provided a clear, tangible demonstration of how extreme weather events can rapidly alter waterways and landscapes.

Throughout the day, connections emerged across multiple areas of study – from land use and climate change to soil health and practical mitigation strategies. Students saw firsthand how measures such as land stabilisation planting, including poplars, play a role in reducing erosion risk.

By the end of the trip, erosion and sedimentation were no longer abstract concepts. They were visible in the land, carried in the water and evident in the paths the students trod – turning theory into experience at every step.



## Lived learning and sensory immersion at St Paul's

Nature can be a symphony for the senses. But it takes time and a trained ear to tune in to all it has to offer.

Nature connection is a way of noticing the notes others don't. It's something St Paul's school in Ngaruawahia has been embracing to build care and respect for the environment.

Year 2 and 3 students and Enviroleaders tuned in to te taiao recently on an exciting bush and nature connection experience along the nearby Hakarimata Rail Trail.

Following a 20-minute walk and a guided meditation to quiet the cares of the outside world, the students were primed to begin noticing more.

Then, through a series of five fun activities, they learned to engage with the environment using all their senses.

Blindfolds helped them to notice more sounds and create sound maps, as well as heightening their sense of touch and smell.

Mirrors helped them see natural spaces in new ways.

Drawing and writing by the waterfall helped encourage calm and cascades of inspiration.

Paint charts were used to match colours found in nature.

A macro-invertebrate stream study also brought a scientific grounding to the thought-provoking experience.

## Breathing life back into neglected waters

**Reported by Cami Carty-Melis (Facilitator, Rotorua Lakes and Waitomo)**

What if a murky, lifeless pond could become the beating heart of a school, alive with movement, discovery and possibility?

During Term 1, senior students at Springdale School set out to make that idea a reality.

They led an inquiry focused on transforming their degraded school pond into a thriving aquatic ecosystem.

Using the Action Learning Cycle as their guide, they began by taking a close look at what they had to work with.

They tested the pond's pH, temperature, clarity and macroinvertebrate life, comparing their findings with those of a healthy ecosystem.

Every result pointed to the same conclusion. The pond was in poor condition. But the students believed they could create something better.

They envisioned a space rich in plant and animal life, where the water supported a healthy ecosystem and the surrounding area invited students to explore, learn and play.

Through research, they identified species that would help restore ecological balance.

They also recognised the need for improved oxygenation and water movement. This thinking led to a design for a two-pond system connected by a stream – creating both habitat and flow.

The senior students shared their ideas with the wider school, while teachers and other students gave feedback which helped refine and strengthen the plan.



But interesting sights and sounds weren't all that was on the menu.

The rangatahi also enjoyed a tasty picnic, and picking wild blackberries on the return journey.

Lead Teacher Abby Han is continuing to build opportunities for classes to connect with nature after attending the Enviroschools Teacher Re-Energise Professional Development session at Forest Lake Primary.

The next step, she says, will be starting to bring more nature into the classroom, setting up nature tables for students to showcase objects found in their environment.

The idea is for everyone to keep up the curiosity levels that drive engaged learning, drawing some of the most interesting items and sharing insights into why they matter.

Later in the term, the entire school travelled to Te Aroha for a hands-on learning experience.

Led by the senior students, all classes learned how to test water quality and assess the health of local lakes and waterways.

At Te Aroha Lake Domain, students spotted koi carp. This sparked conversations about pest and invasive species and may shape the focus of their inquiry in Term 2.

The project now moves into its next phase – taking action.

Over the coming terms, students will begin building their redesigned pond system.

And, after that, they'll return to testing and observation, measuring the pond's water quality again to see whether their efforts have created the ecosystem they imagined.



# He rauemi | Resource spotlight



Matariki is a time for reflection and strengthening connections between people and te taiao.

In this excellent spotlight collection from NZAEE, you'll find resources to support teachers', as well as activities to explore with students.

[Access the resource.](#)

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### Find out more

[enviroschools.org.nz](https://enviroschools.org.nz)

Visit the team area for a great selection of national news, resources and ideas. To register, go to 'Team Area Login' and click 'Register'. Please note that you'll need your school or centre's MoE number to complete the registration process. You can find it on [educationcounts.govt.nz](https://educationcounts.govt.nz).

#### Waikato Enviroschools Facebook

[facebook.com/groups/waikatoenviroschools](https://facebook.com/groups/waikatoenviroschools)

Join our friendly and supportive closed forum to share inspiration, thoughts, learnings and more.



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