

2023 Annual Report

Penrith Lakes Environmental Education Centre



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Introduction

The Annual Report for 2023 is provided to the community of Penrith Lakes Environmental Education Centre as an account of the school's operations and achievements throughout the year.

It provides a detailed account of the progress the school has made to provide high quality educational opportunities for all students, as set out in the Strategic Improvement Plan. It outlines the findings from self-assessment that reflect the impact of key school strategies for improved learning and the benefit to all students from the expenditure of resources, including equity funding.

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Message from the principal

2023 was another productive year for PLEEC with our highest-ever number of student and teachers participating in PLEEC programs, with 13,004 students and teachers participating in direct 'face to face' PLEEC teaching and learning programs. Schools have been eager to return to authentic 'real world' learning experiences we provide in the post-COVID world. In 2023, the PLEEC principal continued to be the elected NSW EZEC Representative and worked with DoE Sustainability Infrastructure Team on part-time basis in designing and implementing a number of sustainability initiatives across NSW schools for over 26,000 students and teachers.

Our in-schools Kitchen Gardens program has also gone from strength to strength, with now 104 NSW schools participating in the program and 11 other environmental education centres also taking part with their local schools. This was a huge boost for the Kitchen Gardens program in NSW and we look forward to supporting all the participating schools and their educational, wellbeing and sustainability outcomes via this successful program.

PLEEC staff, who make PLEEC the amazing place that it is, have a lot to be proud of and I thank them for all their outstanding care and efforts to support student learning, wellbeing and sustainability in 2023.

School vision

Our vision:

'We aim to deliver high quality curriculum based learning experiences for all students and empower them to effect positive changes for a sustainable future'.

NSW Environmental and Zoo Education Centres' Vision Statement

To support NSW Public Schools to implement Sustainability Education through meaningful learning experiences in and about the natural, built and cultural environment. We strive to be the leaders in providing students with the skills, values and opportunities to act as responsible citizens.

School context

Penrith Lakes Environmental Education Centre PLEEC is one of 24 Environmental and Zoo Education Centres EZEC operated by the NSW Department of Education DoE. PLEEC actively collaborates across this network to set directions and develop the organisation for environmental and sustainability education.

In 2014 PLEEC relocated to the Sydney International Regatta Centre SIRC on a temporary lease agreement due to Penrith Lakes Development Corporation PLDC requesting back the founding site after 18 years of tenure. Future permanent relocation plans are still underway that will see the centre move into the completed Penrith Lakes Scheme. PLDC and the state government continue to negotiate the future of the scheme and PLEEC is unable to relocate until these negotiations are completed.

The centre is distinguished by our unique local partnerships that have been formed with Catholic Education Office, SIRC, Penrith City Council and The Western Sydney Social Sciences Teachers Association WeSSSTA.

PLEEC programs are designed to address primary and secondary key learning areas, including fieldwork and sustainability education as a cross-curriculum priority. PLEEC's unique location within SIRC that is part of the greater Penrith Lakes Scheme and at the foothills of the Blue Mountains National Park, all combine to form an ideal learning environment.

Schools using PLEEC services are drawn primarily from the Western Sydney Metropolitan area. Teachers booking PLEEC are offered support (including phone conversations, pre-excursion visits, written confirmation, program advice and online support via the PLEEC website), to ensure the service we provide meets their needs. Communication covers logistics, special needs of students, syllabus links, learning experiences, resources and risk assessments.

As a result of our situational analysis, our big ticket items for the next four years include:

- Establishing more systematic student impact data collection and it's analysis processes, so we can track student learning and our impact on a more regular basis with more quality data.
- Increasing the type of quality programs on offer at PLEEC, based on the research evidence evaluated.
- Reviewing all of our current programs to suit the new NSW 'curriculum review' syllabuses and the new PLEEC relocation site and its local context.
- Further building the capacity of all staff (PLEEC and inschool teachers) through both direct TPL opportunities and more explicit collaborative teaching and learning practices as part of the PDP cycle.
- More focus on workforce planning for the future sustainability of all PLEEC programs both inschools and at the centre. We aim to have two full-time teachers on site and a Kitchen Gardens AP managing the inschool programs and four teachers.
- Establishing a world class 'Centre of Excellence' in environmental education and sustainability with high quality and innovative physical facilities that will best cater to our locally contextualised programs and outdoor learning experiences. This new PLEEC facility will be 'future proofed' and will be able to cater to more visiting schools than ever before as the demand for outdoor 'real world' programs continues to grow.

Self-assessment and school achievement

This section of the annual report outlines the findings from self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework, school achievements and the next steps to be pursued.

This year, our school undertook self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework. The Framework is a statement of what is valued as excellence for NSW public schools, both now and into the future. The Framework supports public schools throughout NSW in the pursuit of excellence by providing a clear description of high quality practice across the three domains of Learning, Teaching and Leading.

Each year, we assess our practice against the Framework to inform our Strategic Improvement Plan and annual report.

Our self-assessment process will assist the school to refine our Strategic Improvement Plan, leading to further improvements in the delivery of education to our students.

For more information about the School Excellence Framework: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability>

Self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework

Elements	2023 School Assessment
LEARNING: Learning Culture	Sustaining and Growing
LEARNING: Wellbeing	Sustaining and Growing
LEARNING: Curriculum	Excelling
LEARNING: Assessment	Sustaining and Growing
LEARNING: Reporting	Delivering
LEARNING: Student growth and performance	Delivering
TEACHING: Effective classroom practice	Sustaining and Growing
TEACHING: Data skills and use	Sustaining and Growing
TEACHING: Professional standards	Sustaining and Growing
TEACHING: Learning and development	Excelling
LEADING: Educational leadership	Excelling
LEADING: School planning, implementation and reporting	Sustaining and Growing
LEADING: School resources	Excelling
LEADING: Management practices and processes	Excelling

Strategic Direction 1: Student growth and attainment

Purpose

Facilitate and measure high quality teaching and learning through the development of authentic experiences that model the School Excellence Framework, so all students can be engaged and empowered to achieve more educational and wellbeing outcomes.

Initiatives

This year our school implemented the following initiatives to support the realisation of the four year Strategic Improvement Plan and the achievement of system-negotiated and school-determined targets.

- Formative assessment and program evaluation
- Greater student reach and more quality programs
- Program review

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Summary of progress

- Formative assessment and program evaluation - We are continuing to grow our formative assessment practices across all of our programs and continuing to innovate ways of achieving this in an environmental education context.
- Greater student reach and more quality programs - We are continuing to grow our student numbers, with 2023 being the highest ever year.
- Program review - We are continuing to review all of our programs for syllabus relevance, student engagement and risk assessments to ensure they are of the highest quality.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

The annual progress measures indicate the expected annual level of achievement for each improvement measure, aligned to the initiatives, in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Schools evaluate their achievement against annual progress measures to determine progress and inform future planning.

Annual progress measure	Progress towards achievement
30% of each program's cohort is measured and evaluated via formative assessment.	A total of 374 students were assessed in 2023 across all of our K-12 programs. Some examples include Stage 1 showing an overall 59.5% improvement in their pre to post assessments. Stage 3 showing a 89.6% improvement, Stage 4 a 58% improvement and Stage 6 a very significant 102.3% improvement, and this was a very encouraging result, especially as the fieldwork completed on the day is linked to school assessment tasks.
Increase a number of students participating in both on-site and in-school PLEEC programs to 8000 students per year. Trial and develop 1 new PLEEC program.	In 2023, 6404 students attended PLEEC on site excursions and 5040 students participated in the PLEEC Kitchen Gardens program. In addition to that, our first sustainability outreach program saw 480 students from rural NSW areas taking part in 2023. A total of 13,004 students (highest ever) participated in face to face PLEEC programs. That is a 16% increase on our 2022 numbers of 10,9270 students. We also added one more program to our program list.
A range of evidence supports our assessment/validation in the element curriculum at sustaining and growing. (Curriculum review considerations).	All PLEEC 2023 programs have been collaboratively reviewed by PLEEC and external school staff for syllabus, wellbeing, ATSI and sustainability relevance, including student engagement. Any new recent syllabus changes have also been implemented into PLEEC programs with Stage 6 Geography ready to roll out for 2024 implementation. We continue to plan for the new Science and Geography K-10 new syllabus roll out in 2025.
A range of evidence supports our assessment/validation in the element of school resources at excelling. (New	Our long term planned and much anticipated new centre delivery has been cancelled by NSW Treasury in Nov, 23. We now have new plans for a double site PLEEC operation, with the Wildlife Lake site now being a

centre).

potential second demountable classroom being explored. We are reviewing all our options for the best curriculum delivery model.

Strategic Direction 2: Develop teacher capacity

Purpose

Build and enhance teacher capacity, both at PLEEC and inschools, as learners and leaders across the curriculum, wellbeing and sustainability pedagogies. Teachers will empower students and school communities towards productive, healthy and sustainable citizenship.

Initiatives

This year our school implemented the following initiatives to support the realisation of the four year Strategic Improvement Plan and the achievement of system-negotiated and school-determined targets.

- PLEEC Professional learning and development
- Increase school teacher capacity
- Increase PLEEC student participation

Resources allocated to this strategic direction

Professional learning

Summary of progress

- **PLEEC Professional learning and development** - All staff have completed their 2023 PDP's with the principal or our Kitchen Gardens AP. Both systematic formal and in-formal collaborative teaching observations and feedback sessions have been conducted. Staff capacity building is evident through the quality of teaching and learning occurring at PLEEC and student learning data.
- **Increase school teacher capacity** - PLEEC continued to host PL sessions and in 2023, 27 teachers attended on site PL sessions, and 86 attended in online forums via the KG online meetings. This has resulted in **113** teachers participating in PLEEC PL opportunities in 2023.
- **Increase PLEEC student participation** - No new staff have been added to PLEEC in 2023, however the growth in our online KG forum has been significant with 59 schools signing up this year to join the KG program from across the state, aided by the DoE School Sustainability Grants. This has meant that our KG AP position has been able to support these schools via the online forum and additional administration days provided.

Progress towards achieving improvement measures

The annual progress measures indicate the expected annual level of achievement for each improvement measure, aligned to the initiatives, in the Strategic Improvement Plan. Schools evaluate their achievement against annual progress measures to determine progress and inform future planning.

Annual progress measure	Progress towards achievement
All staff have completed their PDP's with the principal. Both formal and in-formal collaborative teaching observations and feedback sessions have been conducted. Staff capacity building is evident through the quality of teaching and learning occurring at PLEEC and student learning data.	All staff have completed their PDP's in 2023 with the principal or the KG AP. Teacher observations were conducted on at least two occasions by all staff in 2023. Our overwhelmingly positive teacher and student evaluations and student formative assessment results are evidence of the quality of teaching and learning occurring at PLEEC and the impact of our professional development.
At least 65 teachers have participated in PLEEC (Education for Sustainability) based professional learning.	PLEEC continued to host PL sessions and in 2023, 27 teachers attended on site PL sessions, and 86 attended in online forums via the KG online meetings. This has resulted in 113 teachers participating in PLEEC PL opportunities in 2023.
PLEEC visiting student numbers have increased PLEEC's staffing from 2.6 FTE teachers to 3.0 FTE teachers at	No new staff have been added to PLEEC in 2023, however the growth in our online KG forum has been significant with 59 schools signing up this year to join the KG program from across the state, aided by the DoE School

the Centre and from **3.8** FTE Kitchen Garden teachers to **4.2** FTE full-time Kitchen Garden teachers, including an AP position to lead the Kitchen Garden program.

Sustainability Grants. This has meant that our KG AP position has been able to support these schools via the online forum and additional administration days provided. Last year we achieved our 4.2FTE KG staffing goal and 3 FTE PLEEC staffing goal through the exceptional growth in school participation across all of our programs.

Student information

In 2023, **6404** students attended PLEEC on site excursions and **5040** students participated in the PLEEC Kitchen Gardens program. In addition to that, our first sustainability outreach program saw **480** students from rural NSW areas taking part in 2023. A total of **13,004 students (highest ever)** participated in face to face PLEEC programs.

That is a **16%** increase on our 2022 numbers of 10,9270 students.

Attendance

NSW student attendance data in 2020 is not comparable to other years due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NSW Government encouraged students to learn from home, where possible, for a seven week period from 24 March to 22 May 2020. During this period, schools monitored engagement with learning to determine whether students were marked present. This changed the attendance measure. There was also some evidence of varied marking practices as schools adjusted to the learning from home period, with some schools recording higher attendance rates while others recording markedly lower rates.

Attendance figures from 2021 were calculated differently to align with the third edition of ACARA's National Standards for Student Attendance Data and Reporting. Changes include treating partial absences over 120 minutes as a half day absence (instead of their actual value, calculated as a proportion of a nominal 6-hour day) and covers all weeks during Semester 1. Prior to 2021, the final week of Term 2 was excluded.

Furthermore, the department implemented an automated attendance feed (AAF) system in Semester 1 2021. AAF transfers data automatically from third-party attendance management systems to the department's centralised data warehouse every night. The AAF significantly improved data quality in 2021, which has affected data comparability with previous years.

Although there were no state-wide or regional lockdowns in NSW during Semester 1 2021, COVID-19 continued to affect student attendance. Analysis of attendance codes showed a change in the structure of absence reasons in 2021.

Although there were no state-wide or regional lockdowns in NSW during Semester 1 2022, student attendance was impacted by a range of factors:

- * Families evacuating and relocating due to NSW floods
- * Sick students staying at home until a negative COVID-19 test was returned
- * Household members testing positive to COVID-19
- * The easing of COVID-19 border controls at the beginning of 2022 which allowed families to travel inter-state and overseas.

While there were no lockdowns or learning from home periods in Semester 1 2023, there was still a high prevalence of sick attendance codes as students were encouraged to stay home if they were even slightly unwell. Advice for families were still in place, recommending students and staff to stay home when sick and only returning to school when they were symptom free. (See <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/covid-19/advice-for-families> for advice).

Management of non-attendance

Attendance at school has a big impact on longer term outcomes for children and young people. When a child is not at school they miss important opportunities to learn, build friendships and develop their skills through play. Regular attendance at school is a shared responsibility between schools and parents. By working together we can have a positive effect on supporting our children and young people to regularly attend school.

Our teachers promote and monitor regular attendance at school and all our schools have effective measures in place to record attendance and follow up student absences promptly. They are guided by the School Attendance policy which details the management of non-attendance.

Workforce information

Workforce composition

Position	FTE*
Principal(s)	1
Classroom Teacher(s)	1
School Administration and Support Staff	1.19

*Full Time Equivalent

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce composition

The department actively supports the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees through the use of identified positions, and scholarship opportunities to become a teacher and by providing a culturally safe workplace. As of 2023, 2.5% of the department's overall workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school workforce composition

Staff type	Benchmark ¹	2023 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation ²
School Support	3.00%	3.60%
Teachers	3.00%	3.40%

Note 1: The NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025 takes a career pathway approach in that it sets an ambitious target of 3% Aboriginal employment at each non-executive grade of the public sector by 2025.

Note 2: Representation of diversity groups are calculated as the estimated number of staff in each group divided by the total number of staff. These statistics have been weighted to estimate the representation of diversity groups in the workforce, where diversity survey response rates were less than 100 per cent. The total number of staff is based on a headcount of permanent and temporary employees.

Teacher qualifications

All casual, temporary and permanent teachers in NSW public schools must hold a NSW Department of Education approval to teach. Teachers with approval to teach must be accredited with the NSW Education Standards Authority, and hold a recognised teaching degree. All NSW teachers must hold a valid NSW Working With Children Check clearance.

Professional learning and teacher accreditation

Professional learning is core to enabling staff to improve their practice. Professional learning includes five student-free School Development Days and induction programs for staff new to our school and/or system. These days are used to improve the capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff in line with school and departmental priorities.

Financial information

Financial summary

The information provided in the financial summary includes reporting from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. The Principal is responsible for the financial management of the school and ensuring all school funds are managed in line with department policy requirements.

	2023 Actual (\$)
Opening Balance	788,825.12
Revenue	1,596,266.19
Appropriation	695,921.78
Sale of Goods and Services	-200.00
Grants and contributions	353,210.82
Investment income	30,173.44
Other revenue	517,160.15
Expenses	-1,536,861.11
Employee related	-1,080,760.90
Operating expenses	-456,100.21
Surplus / deficit for the year	59,405.08
Closing Balance	848,230.20

Figures presented in this report may be subject to rounding so may not reconcile exactly with the bottom line totals, which are calculated without any rounding.

Financial summary - Equity loadings

The equity loading data is the main component of the 'Appropriation' line item of the financial summary above.

	2023 SBAR Adjustments (\$)
Targeted Total	0
Equity Total	0
Equity - Aboriginal	0
Equity - Socio-economic	0
Equity - Language	0
Equity - Disability	0
Base Total	480,263
Base - Per Capita	15,616
Base - Location	324
Base - Other	464,323
Other Total	11,471
Grand Total	491,733

Figures presented in this report may be subject to rounding so may not reconcile exactly with the bottom line totals, which are calculated without any rounding.

Parent/caregiver, student, teacher satisfaction

Overall, in 2023, PLEEC achieved very highly in both student and staff post excursion evaluations. Some examples from the **101** visiting teachers' responses include:

- 'The program was strongly linked to the curriculum and supported and strengthened classroom learning outcomes', **95.1%** of teachers gave the program the top scores of 4 or 5.
- 'The staff were knowledgeable about the topics being taught, and interacted well with the students', had **99%** of teachers give the program the top scores of 4 or 5.

Visiting teachers commented:

- All teachers were excellent and very engaging!
- Staff worked and interacted well with the kids, knew their stuff and delivered the lessons with interest and passion.
- 'They were fabulous! Great interaction with the kids. The sites visited were informative and engaging'.
- 'They were very organised and had excellent knowledge of the course content'.

In 2023, out of the **175** student evaluations collected, there were similarly positive results. Examples include:

- 'My teachers at Penrith Lakes helped me to better understand the environment and a subject I have been studying, had **96%** of all students agree.
- 'I learnt a lot about the environment and ways to care for it', had **93%** students agree.

This is another great result and evidence of learning for PLEEC and we will continue to collect this important student learning impact data in 2024. Some of the 2023 'Best part of the Day' teacher evaluation comments included:

- Learning outdoors in a wonderful environment, seeing the birds and other wildlife. It took the learning out of the textbook and it into practical terms.
- 'A variety of activities, dry and wet environments and encounters with animals was a treat!
- 'Great experience, knowledgeable staff, organised well and first hand investigations were very well organised'.
- 'My colleagues and I were so impressed with the staff that helped us yesterday. They were very professional and clearly passionate about the program they run. There were lots of excited chatter from the children and parent helpers about their favourite parts. So again, a huge thank you!'

Staff at PLEEC have been asked to comment on the progress of Kitchen Gardens program. They have stated they believe it is going well and suggested we need to keep expanding the program. All staff would like to expand on professional learning opportunities.

Overall, these are indicative of PLEEC's everyday performance and the impact we have on student learning.

Policy requirements

Aboriginal Education Policy

The responsibility for enacting the Aboriginal Education Policy rests with all departmental staff. The policy should underpin and inform planning, teaching practice and approaches to educational leadership in all educational settings.

Evidence of effective implementation of the policy included:

- Establishing, building and strengthening relationships with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Aboriginal people and communities.
- Providing, in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities, education which promotes quality teaching, is engaging, and is culturally appropriate and relevant.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population.
- Implementation of Personalised Learning Pathways for all Aboriginal students in a school culture of high expectations.

Anti-Racism Policy

All teachers are responsible for addressing incidents of racism and supporting students to develop an understanding of racism and discrimination and the impact these may have on individuals and the broader community. The Principal is responsible for examining school practices and procedures to ensure they are consistent with the policy. The school has an Anti-Racism Contact Officer who is trained to respond to concerns in relation to racism.

Multicultural Education Policy

Teachers are responsible for addressing the specific learning and wellbeing needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds through their teaching and learning programs. The Principal is responsible for ensuring that school policies, programs and practices respond to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the school community, and provide opportunities that enable all students to achieve equitable education and social outcomes.