

Early Childhood Educator of the Year

AMANDA FORD KU ANSTO CHILDREN'S CENTRE

highly commended

As Centre Director, Amanda's visionary yet practical leadership is embedding sustainability into daily practice, transforming routines, infrastructure, and curriculum. From Love Food Hate Waste to compost and worm-farm systems, gardens and native habitats, and reusable towel programs, she is turning practical ideas into powerful, lasting habits that reduce waste and strengthen environmental stewardship across the centre.

Amanda actively engages children as co-researchers and problem-solvers, using inquiry-based learning to explore environmental challenges and co-construct solutions. She extends this impact to families through clothing swaps, toy libraries, book recycling, and creative reuse projects, building a genuine sense of shared responsibility and community connection.

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Early Childhood Educator of the Year

AIMEE MADDEN KENSINGTON CASTLE

winner

Aimee is an educator who truly brings sustainability to life, weaving it throughout her pedagogy. You can see it in the child-led rituals she's created, like the "Empty Happy Bowl," with hands-on food-to-plate learning, and the vibrant Sustainability Committee that rotates through roles like Rubbish Ruler, Plant Protector, and Water Warrior.

Children co-design monthly missions, reflect on what's working, and enact solutions. Aimee's holistic approach sees her taking learning out into the bush, connecting students with global SDG projects, and even bringing them into civic advocacy - with some outstanding outcomes: six tons of waste diverted from landfill, 4,000 containers recycled, and \$1,600 raised for OzHarvest.

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Sustainable Schools NSW Teacher of the Year

LUCY BARBUTO HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC PRIMARY, HELENSBURGH *highly commended*

Lucy brings creativity and consistency to her school's sustainability initiatives. Her weekly gardening club gives students hands-on opportunities to develop practical gardening and food growing skills, and understand the importance of caring for the environment. She strengthens these lessons through whole-school practices including championing classroom FOGO bins.

Thanks to Lucy's leadership, these initiatives aren't one-off project, they are becoming long-term habits that build genuine cultural change and make sustainability a practical, shared responsibility.

Through inspired actions, including modelling sustainable costume design, Lucy consistently shows that eco-conscious choices can be innovative, enjoyable, and part of everyday school life.

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Sustainable Schools NSW Teacher of the Year

JENNY HENSON CADDIES CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

winner

Jenny has embedded environmental education across the curriculum, empowering students to take meaningful leadership in sustainability through initiatives such as resource design, multimedia storytelling, and public presentations.

Her work demonstrates a sustained commitment to cultural change, with projects that extend beyond the school into the broader community. The integration of student voice and curriculum alignment has amplified the impact of these initiatives, fostering both agency and deep learning and working with the groups such as World Wildlife Fund, Taronga Zoo and Jane Goodall Institute.

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Return and Earn Program Leader

JOANNE RICE KEARNS PUBLIC SCHOOL

highly commended

Joanne has driven whole-school participation in the Return and Earn program by educating staff and students on the importance of recycling, reinforcing these messages through assemblies, presentations, and visible advocacy. She introduced clear, consistent signage across classrooms, playgrounds, and staff areas, and boosted community involvement with regular social media updates and reminders.

Her leadership has transformed recycling into a valued daily practice, supported by weekly collections, student-led initiatives, and active engagement at major school events. These efforts have not only strengthened environmental awareness and responsible habits across the school but have also raised over \$1400 to date for playground improvements and staff well-being.

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Return and Earn Program Leader

LYNNE GRAHAM TOYBOX EARLY LEARNING, MASCOT

highly commended

Lynne Graham has made Return and Earn a vibrant and meaningful part of daily life at her early learning centre, engaging families and empowering children through hands-on recycling experiences. She introduced a dedicated collection system and encourages children to take an active role each day, building responsibility and environmental awareness from an early age. Her monthly walks to the local depot have become a highlight, where children proudly help sort and deposit recyclables themselves.

Lynne has thoughtfully woven the initiative into the curriculum, using it to teach environmental stewardship, maths concepts such as counting and sorting, and empathy through discussions about how their efforts support marine conservation and local aid. Her leadership has transformed a simple recycling activity into a powerful learning experience that strengthens community connections and inspires real-world impact.

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Return and Earn Program Leader

CAROL ROWE BENNETT ROAD PUBLIC SCHOOL

winner

Carol is the heart of Bennett Road Public School's Return and Earn program - a quiet force whose dedication has turned recyclables into real support for students and families in need. For over five years, she has volunteered her time to collect, sort, and return containers, raising vital funds that have covered groceries, medical appointments, camp fees, and emergency bills.

Her work not only keeps valuable materials out of landfill but also teaches students the power of community care and environmental stewardship - making her an undeniable champion behind this program's lasting success.

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Emerging Educator of the Year

GRANTON LEE BERRIMA PUBLIC SCHOOL

highly commended

Granton has created a vibrant bush school program where K-6 students immerse themselves weekly in hands-on environmental learning - restoring habitats, planting natives, monitoring wildlife, studying river ecosystems and seasonal changes.

Through curriculum embedded ecological inquiry, peer mentoring, quiet leadership and deep care for place, Granton is increasing local biodiversity and inspiring curiosity, wellbeing and stewardship in nature's living classroom.

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Emerging Educator of the Year

MONIQUE BAILEY HAWKESBURY RIVER COUNTY COUNCIL

winner

Monique is to be congratulated on her dynamic, community-centered approach to environmental education, leading initiatives like Hills Eco Kidz, the Schools Wetland Challenge, and koala conservation festivals that connect young people to real-world sustainability action. She bridges conservation, culture, and curriculum through partnerships with First Nations groups, councils, and schools, embedding Ecologically Sustainable Development principles in every project.

From habitat restoration to citizen science and cultural awareness training, Monique empowers communities to become informed, active stewards of their local environment.

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Environmental Educator of the Year

ALANA ROONEY
BLACKTOWN CITY COUNCIL

highly commended

Alana Rooney, brings over 20 years of expertise to her role as Blacktown City Council's Stormwater Education Officer, designing inclusive, curriculum-aligned programs like the Microplastics Challenge and Big Plans for Little Creek that connect science, culture, and community action. She actively builds partnerships across schools, industry, First Nations groups, and organisations such as Sydney Water and Western Sydney Parklands Trust to amplify impact and share best practices.

Through mentorship, youth innovation challenges, and creative outreach, from creek tours to technical training for developers, Alana empowers diverse audiences to protect local waterways and see themselves as environmental stewards for healthy catchments.

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Environmental Educator of the Year

CHRISTINE FREEMAN

RUMBALARA ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE

winner

Christine Freeman, an expert environmental educator with over 30 years experience, has significantly advanced environmental education in NSW through leadership roles at Dorroughby and Rumbalara EECs and as the Environment & Zoo Education Centre (EZEC) Designated Lead Principal in 2024-2025. She champions sustainability by forging strong partnerships, embedding environmental values into curriculum guidance, leading waste-reduction pilots, reconciliation-focused projects, and the award-winning *The Country's Alive* songwriting program.

Known for her relentless advocacy, collaborative spirit, and creative energy, from leading eco-music sessions to hunting down the perfect replacement equipment for her workplace from op shops, Christine continues to inspire systemic change while never losing sight of the small acts that support her colleagues and community.

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