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Botany's sustainable preschool a finalist in national awards

A Sydney preschool specialising in teaching children sustainable practices has been named a finalist in the 2012 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards.

John Brotchie Nursery School, in the south-east Sydney suburb of Botany, has been selected as a finalist in the Advancing Practice Award category for the successful implementation of their Environmental Protection Program.

Historically an industrial area, Botany's factories are being replaced by high-density housing, in which many of the John Brotchie Nursery School children reside. The preschool's focus on natural living and environmental awareness offers students the backyard they might not otherwise have.

According to John Brotchie Nursery School Principal, Rebecca Andrews, the children are learning to be environmentally-conscious citizens, while following the prescribed curriculum and having fun at the same time.

"We have veggie patches, herb gardens, egg-laying chickens, tadpole ponds, compost bins, worm farms, water tanks and recycling bins — all of which the children have a role in," Ms Andrews said.

"The children help plant and harvest their veggies, care for the chickens and collect the eggs, follow the life cycle of new tadpoles and, above all else, continuously recycle everything they can.

"Our Environmental Education Program teaches children the value of waste reduction through effective recycling, which we hope will lay the foundations for a greener future."

The Environmental Education Program began five years ago and continues to grow. The preschool is now so popular in the area that it regularly welcomes groups of TAFE students and personnel from other early childhood facilities to share its philosophy and practices.

The judges commended the preschool for its long-term commitment and future aspirations. The preschool hopes to include a cooking aspect to their program, where students cook healthy meals using the produce they helped to grow.

The John Brotchie Nursery School garden has won previous awards, including first place at the 2011 City of Botany Council Garden competition and the NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network Sprouts Sustainable Practice Awards. Most recently, the school won first prize in the 2012 Keep Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Award for Metropolitan Schools.

The winner of the Advancing Practice Award — and Outstanding Educator Award — will be announced at a gala dinner during Early Childhood Australia's National Conference, at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre on World Teachers' Day, Friday 5 October 2012. The Advancing Practice winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant, provided by ME Bank.

HESTA is one of Australia's largest super funds, with more than 750,000 members and \$20b in assets. It is chosen by more people working in health and community services than any other fund.

Visit hestaawards.com.au to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

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