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Botany 'Bush School' a finalist in national awards

A preschool that established a "Bush School" program for children living in suburban Sydney is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

The John Brotchie Nursery School in Botany, NSW, is one of five finalists in the Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award category.

The School has been recognised for setting up the Bush School program which provides a weekly opportunity for inner-city children to play outside in an unstructured environment and connect with nature.

School Principal, Rebecca Andrews, said the program is based on the Danish Forest School Approach of educating young children in the outdoors, all year round.

"Incorporating the outdoors has been shown to improve children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as improving their health," Ms Andrews said.

"Our parents wanted to give their children more opportunities to play outdoors, develop resilience and take calculated and supported risks."

The John Brotchie Bush School was established in local parkland, about a kilometre from the centre.

"The children walk to the parkland and spend the day playing in the fresh air, climbing trees, running through long grass, digging in the dirt, playing with sticks and singing in our bush band," Ms Andrews said.

"We go rain, hail or shine — with the most fun being had on rainy days, when the children get to jump puddles and play in the mud!"

Ms Andrews said Bush School has proved extremely popular, with more than 90 per cent of families signing up to the program within the first four weeks. All families are now getting involved.

Ms Andrews and other interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne to attend an awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Early Childhood Australia National Conference on Saturday 6 September 2014.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, generously provided by long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank.

The Advancing Pedagogy and Practice, and Excellence in Building Inclusion Award winners will each receive \$10,000 to further implement their program or initiative. The winner of the Outstanding Young Graduate Award will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

HESTA is the super fund for health and community services, with more than 785,000 members and \$28 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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

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