Planning for a nature play space/outdoor classroom at Dalmain Primary School.

By Amanda Wood (parent of Elisa, TA3 and Isabella, Kindy Gold)

Approval has been given from the school P&C, Mr Boyes, Mrs Buswell and the school staff to proceed with planning a nature play space/outdoor classroom at Dalmain Primary School.

Nature play spaces are play areas that use natural, locally sourced and recycled materials such as logs, rocks, stumps, sandpits, tyres, wood and plants. They encourage cooperative play, quiet play, risk taking play and active play. Not only are nature play spaces really fun spaces for our kids but research shows that there are many benefits of these spaces such as: gross motor skill development; increased creativity; improved language and collaboration skills; improved ability to recognise, assess and negotiate risk; improved interaction with adults; increased physical activity; higher resistance to stress; lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression; reduction in bullying behaviour and more positive feelings towards each other; and reduction in symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder.

The first stage is gathering ideas (from students, staff and parents) of the things we’d like to have included in a nature play space. This will be done through interactive sessions both at school with students and through meetings with parents and staff. During this phase we will form a committee of interested, motivated parents and teachers. Through this consultation we will determine the available skills of the school community that can assist with the project e.g. landscape architects, gardeners, landscapers, builders, artists, material supplies.

We will then engage a landscape architect/playground designer to ensure we plan properly and meet all of the safety requirements. We will be guided by the professional advice of where to locate various components of the nature play spaces. Some of them will be segregated e.g. quiet play and active play will be in different zones. Where certain components are located will be dependent on our funds available and existing landscape features. Some of our biggest costs will be the landscape architect and any earthworks that are required. All of these aspects will be considered during the planning phase we are now entering.

The plan prepared by the landscape architect will give us a clearer indication of costs, works involved and timeframe. While the school has some resources we will need to look at other funding opportunities such as community grants, community partnerships, and fundraising.

The next phase of construction and building will be determined based on the community engagement and landscape architect plans. Some of the lower cost plans can be put in place in the shorter term e.g. stepping stones, additions to sandpit play areas such as loose parts play, while others will have a longer time frame that is dependent on funding. Many of these projects will enlist the help of families and staff of the school.
To assist with communication and sharing of ideas a closed Facebook group has been created called “Dalmain Nature Play” to encourage discussion between interested staff and parents. Parents and teachers with a Facebook profile can request to join the group and will be approved once it is established they are associated with the school. Only your public profile is viewable in the group unless you are already ‘friends’ with other members then only they can view your profile as normal. An email account has also been set up (dalmain.nature.play@gmail.com) as another source of contact.

I'll happily answer any questions you have if you contact me through either the Facebook “Dalmain Nature Play” group or the email account. I’m very much looking forward to the next phase of this exciting project.

Thanks,
Amanda Wood