



Ebony having a sensory break

A school food garden for sensory engagement at

# WARATAH SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL SCHOOL

Cultivating Community has created a beautiful sensory garden for students with additional needs at Waratah Special Developmental School. The food garden which grows vegetables, herbs, vines and fruit trees provides a living tapestry for the students to explore and engage with all of their senses.

The students and staff at the school communicate by using the picture exchange communication system (PECS) a method of communicating through images. A favourite picture card used by staff lets the students know that 'it's gardening time!' The gardening routines and repeated tasks, such as watering the plants with a hose or digging a hole with a small shovel, help students develop fine motor-skills. Some students like using much larger tools.

The garden is located in a central position of the school, which lends itself to great accessibility for students and teachers in the surrounding classrooms.

## CREATING GARDEN MOSAICS

During the cold and rainy season of winter the students are involved in designing and creating mosaics for the garden. Ideas are discussed and then individual designs are created by students using paper collage. The students then vote on which designs will be transformed into mosaic panels.

*"The food garden is a wonderful addition to our school environment and the educational programs we provide. Our students love to visit the garden to sample the produce and engage in the sensory experiences offered. We encourage students to develop healthy life style habits and the students are more interested in trying new fruits and vegetables when they have been involved in growing and harvesting them. My office window overlooks the kitchen garden and I often see students come out for a sensory break and 'graze' on the produce on offer. It really helps them regulate their own sensory needs."*

**Jenny Wallace, Principal**

Last year students selected a bee, ladybird and a worm to work on from the theme of mini beasts, the small creatures that use the garden. The students loved the tactile nature of making mosaics especially mixing the tile grouting which was wet and sloppy on such a large scale. These first few panels are now installed on the garden walls as a reminder of the wonderful benefit that these insects have helping the plants and food garden to thrive.

## SENSORY STIMULATION

The food garden is a peaceful haven full of colour and life. Students enjoy visiting the garden on their own to sometimes to pick flowers, or just graze on grapes.

*“Ebony loves plants and flowers. She has started visiting the garden on her own. This is allowing her to self-regulate, becoming more independent as she has built up more trust with the staff. She is interested in it and can ask to go out and visit. Ebony also loves to munch on spring onions!”*

**Jo Stavoris, Middle Years Teacher**



Student adding grout to the worm mosaic

Cultivating Community has increased biodiversity by expanding the food garden throughout the school grounds with help from parent volunteers and working bees.

### Waratah Special Developmental School

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Cultivating Community's first funded food garden project with schools was in 2000 working with kids from across three housing estates to grow food both at home and at school. From this very first seed sown 16 years ago the School Food Garden Program was born and has evolved into a program that still assists schools today to develop a food garden program that is tailor made to fit each school culture and community. To find out more about our program contact Cultivating Community today.

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