



Statewide Mid-Year Report 2026



Goornong PS students sample waterbugs
from the Campaspe River

"Our major theme in Year 5 is citizen science and we run with it all year long. River Detectives forms a big part of our Outdoor Learning Program, Dhumba-dha biik. And we are able to cover a great deal of our curriculum by making our local waterways a focus."

Cornish College educator, Melbourne Water area





Wamba Wemba Traditional Owner Uncle Ron Murray

Acknowledgement

The River Detectives program acknowledges all First Nations People and recognises their enduring connection to these lands and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and affirm our support for their sovereignty, self-determination and continued connection to Culture and Country.

Program delivery

[River Detectives](#) is an engaging environmental education program that connects young people to nature by caring for their local waterway. Students participate in citizen science and learn about the importance of healthy waterways through water quality testing, and the benefits to land, plants, animals and people. Participating schools are provided with equipment, support, training, and teaching resources.

2026 River Detectives delivery partners offering the program to schools in their region

- North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) 1.0 FTE
- Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) 0.2 FTE
- North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA) 0 FTE
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA) 0.1FTE
- Melbourne Water 0.1 FTE

Sponsorship

The North Central CMA program and the program website is funded by Agnico Eagle's Community Partnership Program with additional funding from the Australian Government's Local Environmental Projects Program for the Yaram Yaram Bayikina (Bendigo Creek Reawakening) project. The Corangamite CMA program is supported by Central Highlands Water and Barwon Water.

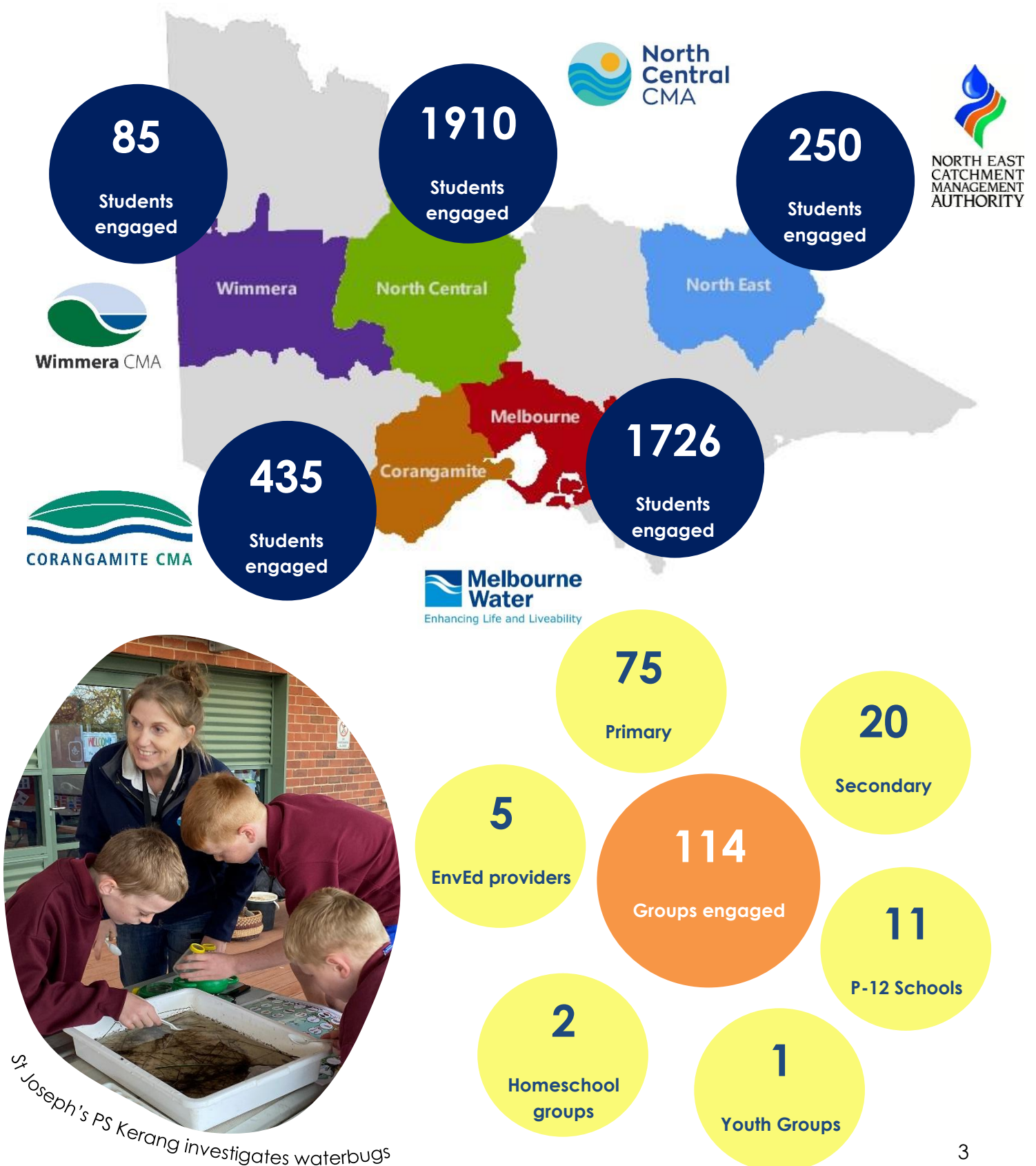


Additional providers

Within some of the above regions, environmental education providers and ResourceSmart Schools facilitators provide program content to both River Detectives schools and a broader range of schools either as incursions or excursions.

Statewide engagement snapshot

Terms one and two, 2026



95

**Participating groups
via CMAs**

44 North Central CMA

22 Corangamite CMA

7 North East CMA

5 Wimmera CMA

17 Melbourne Water

13

**Participating groups
via Environmental
Education providers**

11 Greater Western Water

2 NatureWest

6

**Participating groups
via ResourceSmart
Schools**

6 RSS Loddon-Mallee



Creswick Scouts test their site on Creswick Creek



St James Parish School Sebastopol students

123

**Waterway monitoring
sites**

53 North Central CMA

27 Corangamite CMA

9 North East CMA

4 Wimmera CMA

30 Melbourne Water

87

Data entries

47 North Central CMA

30 Corangamite CMA

0 North East CMA

na Wimmera CMA

10 Melbourne Water

64 Water-quality Tests

12 Waterbug samples

11 Habitat surveys

173

Educators supported

65 North Central CMA

25 Corangamite CMA

7 North East CMA

8 Wimmera CMA

68 Melbourne Water

27

Training workshops delivered

Ballarat River Detectives introductory PD session



2

Ask The Expert webinars



Rethinking rats as rakali for primary students
with author Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder



Questions submitted
by Boort District P-12
School and Cornish
College

2

Written and video
school stories

[RedGum Waldorf School of
Central Victoria](#)

[Emmaus Catholic Primary School](#)



Rethinking rats as rakali for secondary students
with freshwater ecologist Dr Emmalie Sanders

38

School sessions
delivered by CMAs

13

School sessions
delivered by
Environmental
Education Providers

2

School sessions
delivered by
ResourceSmart
Schools



Woodline PS students investigate waterbugs



Woodend PS students rinse out test tubes
ready for the reactive phosphorus test



NatureWest's waterbug incursion set up
and ready to go at Kororoit Creek



St Bernard's College students test the turbidity
of Painkalac Creek Aireys Inlet

Program highlights

2026 ResourceSmart Schools Awards, June 11, 2026

Four River Detectives schools were named as finalists across a variety of categories in this year's ResourceSmart Schools Awards, recognising their commitment to embedding sustainability, in part by using the River Detectives program.

- **Siena Catholic Primary School**
- **Wendouree Primary School**
- **RedGum Waldorf School of Central Victoria**
- **Pleasant Street Primary School, Lake Wendouree**

Congratulations to **Pleasant Street Primary**, winning the CDS Vic Excellence Award for their container recycling initiatives keeping drink containers out of our waterways.



"Students in the sustainability group lead the school's CDS Vic participation to shift how the school community thinks about waste and recycling. The group develops targeted videos and posters to encourage student and family involvement, organises clean up events, and promotes collection at school assemblies."

ResourceSmart Schools website

Congratulations to **Stephen McNeight of Wendouree Primary School** for winning Primary Teacher of the Year. Stephen implements the River Detectives program at the school along with a variety of other innovative sustainability initiatives.

"Stephen's enthusiastic approach to sustainability involves the whole school. Students have helped to transform the school grounds and relationships have been built with educational programs. By fostering a love for nature and learning, Stephen has improved the school campus while inspiring a whole community."

ResourceSmart Schools website



Congratulations to **RedGum, The Waldorf School of Central Victoria** for winning ResourceSmart School of the Year that recognises outstanding sustainability achievement through:

- positive impact and innovation
- addressing sustainability as a cross-curriculum priority in the Victorian Curriculum
- engaging the broader community
- improvements to campus operations and/infrastructure
- sustainability leadership in the education sector/other schools.



ResourceSmart
Schools Awards 2026



"This 5-Star school fosters strong connections to nature using their wetlands as a classroom."

Students work with RMIT university to study gas emissions from stagnant waterways and with Junior Landcare, North Central Catchment Management Authority and Charles Sturt University to increase biodiversity in the wetlands, a space that has become a place to mentor schools beginning their sustainability journey."

ResourceSmart Schools website



Judges commented "RedGum's centering of sustainability ripples out from students to families and the broader community, creating a network of inspired sustainability champions. RedGum models what is possible when a deep commitment to sustainability is paired with strong local and global awareness. The mentoring of other schools showcases a commitment to sustainability at school and beyond. Congratulations."

Greater Western Water takes River Detectives on the road, Melbourne Water area

Greater Western Water participates in River Detectives. They use program resources and citizen science activities in the delivery of their 'sustainable practices' incursion available for bookings by schools in their service area.

This enables schools who are not registered with River Detectives in their own right to experience the program and shares important water health messages to hundreds of additional students

2026 engagement

11 incursions delivered

706 students engaged

33 teachers supported

Pomonal Primary School flora field survey at Lake Fyans, Wimmera CMA region

Grade 4-6 students from Pomonal PS visited Lake Fyans near the Grampians on a crisp winter's day on June 11 with River Detectives coordinator Jeanie Clark. The aim was to complete a survey of flora at the site using a plant guide developed by Jeanie beforehand to complement their learning unit about plants and climate regions. Students used the guide as a plant hunt chart, working in pairs with the challenge of:

- learning the name of at least one new plant to teach someone else
- finding as many of the plants on the chart
- marking the location of their plants on a transect photo

Lake Fyans, Kelley's Beach, Plant Key early winter 2026

no.	Common Name	photo	Your symbol	no.	Common Name	photo	Your symbol	no.	Common Name	photo	Your symbol	no.	Common Name	photo	Your symbol
1	Algae			6	Cranberry Heath			11	River Red Gum			16	Pennywort		
2	Basket Sedge			7	Flax Lily			12	Rooting Shank Mushroom			17	Yellow Box		
3	Black Wattle			8	Grey Ever-lasting			13	Silver Banksia			18	Water Ribbons		
4	Black-wood			9	Gilled Mushroom			14	Soursob			19			
5	Cherry Ballart			10	Quaking Grass			15	Spike Rush			20			



Pomonal PS students complete a flora field survey Lake Fyans

Students learnt about the different needs of plants and why they prefer different homes. The activity followed a similar one with Jeparit PS at Lake Hindmarsh in 2023, so comparisons were made between the two sites in the Wimmera CMA region. River Red Gums were common to both lakes however Lake Fyans had Yellow Boxes further back on the verge whereas Lake Hindmarsh had Black Boxes.

Pomonal PS students are now hoping to make a plant guide from their flora survey findings for the Lake Fyans caravan park for use by patrons.

Cultural burn at Mullinmur Billabong, North East CMA region

This project provided Galen Catholic College school students with an opportunity to learn cultural burn practices from Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation (BAC).

Students were involved in planning the delivery of the cultural burn at Mullinmur Billabong with BAC's Ngalan Bitja (Our Fire) Ranger Team.

Favourable weather conditions arrived in May 2026 enabling the burn to go ahead resulting in powerful knowledge sharing about the important role of cultural fire in managing riparian ecosystems:

- Protecting large old trees, keystones of healthy Country, from the impact of uncontrolled fire.
- Reducing leaf litter loads and the harmful effects of blackwater events and fish kills.
- Rejuvenating native plants such as Kangaroo Grass that need fire to thrive.
- Creating space for small native herbs to grow such as the rare Floodplain Violet.



Proposed cultural burn area at Mullinmur Billabong



Cultural fire being practiced at Mullinmur Billabong

The project has helped students understand the interconnections between land and water management and the importance of caring for Country in a holistic way. It also strengthened the relationships between North East CMA, Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation, Galen Catholic College and Landcare.

Thanks to Agncio Eagle's Community Partnerships Program for supporting and funding this great project.

Yaram Yaram Bayikina project, North Central CMA region

River Detectives in the North Central CMA region has had an injection of funding thanks to the Australian Government's Local Environmental Projects Program for this very exciting project partnering with DJAARA and the City of Greater Bendigo. The Bendigo Creek Reawakening project will deliver environmental restoration, creek renaturalisation, erosion control, water quality improvements, cultural perspectives and community engagement activities across the Bendigo Creek catchment guided by the Wayaparrangu approach (we all meet).



While this project is very much about reawakening Bendigo Creek that has been highly modified as a result of the gold rush, it's also about reawakening people's relationship with the creek and River Detectives is playing a pivotal role.

Fifteen schools have been engaged in the program and will receive an intensive River Detectives experience over the life of this project until March 2028:

- Enjoying three annual incursions from Nicole Howie, North Central CMA River Detectives coordinator (water quality testing, impacts of urban stormwater, waterbug sampling).
- Participating in two annual stormwater pit stencilling excursions to have agency in raising community awareness about the relationship between stormwater and Bendigo Creek.
- Receiving a macroinvertebrate kit to carry out citizen science investigations.
- Embedding DJAARA perspectives, accessing cultural resources and activities.



Quarry Hill PS students learn about stormwater (left) and Victory Christian College students complete their water quality testing at Kennington reservoir (right).

Collaborating in a Community of Practice, Corangamite CMA region

A Community of Practice is more than just a meeting, it's a dynamic group of people united by a shared passion, common challenges, and a desire to learn from one another. Through ongoing collaboration, participants deepen their understanding and build expertise together.

This spirit of shared learning was on full display as Corangamite River Detectives coordinator Bec McCristal, joined three Ballarat schools – St James Parish School, Siena Catholic Primary School and St Alipius Parish School – for a ResourceSmart School Community of Practice workshop. The session provided students with a hands-on opportunity to connect with their local environment while developing practical scientific skills. Two of the schools had prior experience with the River Detectives program, while for the third school it provided a valuable introduction.



Students diving into the world of waterbugs

At the heart of the workshop was a shared commitment; learning about our natural environment and understanding how best to preserve and protect it. Students explored freshwater habitats, discovering that waterbugs are more than just tiny aquatic insects, they are essential biological indicators. They learnt how even the smallest creatures can tell big environmental stories.

The workshop also highlighted the important role of citizen scientists. Participants were encouraged to see themselves not just as learners, but as contributors to real world environmental monitoring. Their observations and data collection support broader scientific efforts, helping to track environmental change and inform conservation strategies.

Initiatives such as this demonstrate how Communities of Practice can inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, equipping them with both curiosity and the capability to care for our natural world.



Sensitive waterbugs indicate good waterway health

Students Ask the Expert about rakali, Melbourne Water area

Cornish College is a passionate and very active River Detectives school, always keen to participate in extra River Detectives opportunities. When questions were invited from schools to pose to experts about rakali (Australia's native water rat), Grade 5 Cornish College students were quick to respond.

Their questions were so thoughtful and insightful that they were used for the secondary webinar chat with Charles Sturt University research fellow and freshwater ecologist Dr Emmalie Sanders.

In 2025, the rakali was named as Australia's most underrated native animal in a science week poll by the ABC.

Emmalie was highly impressed by the knowledge and interest students demonstrated by the mature vocabulary used in their impressive questions. Among the questions were:



"Can rakali survive brackish water?"

Aarav, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali are found in estuaries and along coastal beaches. They are not bothered by the salinity of water.

"How do rakali adapt when hunting in different biomes?"

Henry, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali have different hunting mechanisms for different habitats. They are usually an ambush predator but can dive underwater, swim and circle logs, dig up their prey from the substrate of waterways or hunt on land. They are very adaptable.

"How do rakali affect their habitat's food chain?"

Caitlin, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali are good at controlling species that can become abundant including exotic fish such as carp.

School highlights

Schools use the River Detectives program as a vehicle to drive learning programs, inform inquiry projects and inspire community interactions. The program loves to hear about how schools are adapting River Detectives to their own unique needs and embedding it into their learning programs.



Tawonga PS monitoring waterbugs in class



Cornish College uploaded site photos to the data portal



Aireys Inlet complete monthly testing during their regular outing to Painkalac Creek

Left: Malmsbury PS include an interactive waterbug display in their stall at the Malmsbury Fayre. On the day they got chatting with the Friends of Malmsbury Gardens group and the school will now add a monitoring site at the lake in the gardens as the group is worried about its water quality.



Axedale PS educators take 3D photos of their Campaspe River site (left) so that students can take a look around using a VR headset (right) for times when they can't walk to the site.



Left: Cohuna Consolidated School was new to the River Detectives program in 2026 and has made the most of its school community with a parent volunteer, Landcare Coordinator and work experience student with the Western Murray Land Improvement Group helping them to their first excursion to nearby Gunbower Creek and studying aquatic vegetation.



Above: Four River Detectives schools in the North Central CMA region took up the opportunity to experience cultural sessions with Barapa Barapa and Yorta Yorta man Kai Lane from the Habitat Warriors program. They participated in dance and storytelling and wove Yedabila habitat pods from native lignum using traditional techniques. These will be placed in waterways as breeding and refuge sites.

Year 5/6 students were supported by their teachers and event partners to run their second annual Clear The Carp event at Mount Emu Creek. This was a great initiative of the school, along with Fishcare Victoria, activating students to be community leaders and environmental advocates!



This is a student-led community fishing and environmental action day at Mount Emu Creek, proudly delivered by the Grade 5/6 students from Skipton Primary School. Supported by Fishcare Victoria's Catch a Carp project, the event features fishing clinics, habitat activities with OzFish and carp processing and cooking demonstrations with Keith Bell.



"Carp are disturbing the mud in the bottom of the creek, making it extremely difficult for the platypus to find food and survive."

Skipton PS student

"Carp breed all year round, and they eat native fish eggs and larvae that feed other native fish and birds."

Skipton PS student

Broader events



Bendigo Sustainability Festival

Sharing messages of waterway health with the sustainability community.



Huntly Family Fun Day

What better activity for kids than splashing around with waterbugs on a summer's day!

Attending alongside program sponsors Agnico Eagle to assess the Campaspe River.



Axedale Quick Shear event

Students learnt traditional weaving techniques to make spherical habitat pods for wetlands



Barwon River Come and Try sessions

For a glimpse into the program, showcasing a hands on approach to learning.

Participant quotes

"River Detectives offers an authentic, hands-on way for students to understand sustainability and the real-world impact humans have on local waterways. We value this program because it connects classroom learning with meaningful action, helping students see themselves as capable contributors to environmental stewardship."

Mount Clear College educator
Corangamite CMA region

"We are building links with indigenous ecologists and Elders keen to share and work with students. Students are constantly asking questions about our local environment and relating their personal experiences to the program."

St Joseph's PS Kerang educator
North Central CMA region

"Our students learn to understand the intricate relationships that exist within our Wimmera lakes ecosystems. Our school benefits by being able to access specialised equipment for water testing. Our community benefits by having young people trained in these skills and being able to communicate to their parents and grandparents the importance of sustainable practices and looking after the environment."

Goroke P-12 College
Wimmera CMA region



"We are trying to motivate young people to be active participants within their community - school, local, region, national, international. I also want the learning to be real, where data can be shared, and learners are not "just doing a school project". They will be citizen scientists operating in real environments, not just doing an activity in a classroom."

Global Village Learning, New Gisborne educator
Melbourne Water area

"Our school has a diverse group of students and families. Many have complex learning challenges. River Detectives is where many of these students shine. All our students adore it, as do the families. We continue to embed it in Math, Integrated studies, Art, our Koori program and any science studies we do."

Tawonga PS educator
North East CMA region