



## Margaret River Independent School

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**Margaret River Independent School has proven itself fertile ground in more ways than one.**

The small school just south of Witchcliffe sits on a unique site with 7.5ha of Jarrah and Marri remnant forest, providing habitat for many native species. It is also fertile teaching ground where the next generation is learning about the importance of conservation.

MRIS formed in 1982 and was the brainchild of ten local families who wanted a closer relationship to their children’s education. The school has gone from strength to strength and now has a solid base of volunteers who oversee conservation projects and have input into teacher-directed environmental programs.

Just a few of these include developing a Bushland Management Plan, getting involved in Nature Conservation-run programs, acknowledging the six Aboriginal seasons to raise awareness of traditional practices and environmental observations, holding cultural burning workshops, rehabilitating an eroding drain into a ‘frog bog’, erecting interpretive signs, and publishing a book with student contributions.

Pam Tuffin doesn't like to take credit, but there's no denying she's had a part to play in these success stories. She has been named Teacher of the Year in both the WA Spatial Excellent Awards and Asia-Pacific Spatial Excellence Awards, but even then, she doesn't see them as personal wins. Instead, she sees them as wins for the school – because for her it's a collective effort, with the benefits flowing onto the next generation.



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“The environment is intertwined with the school curriculum and we’ve made understanding sustainability and the local history of the forest a priority,” she said. “It’s important because it’s their future we’re talking about.”

One of Pam’s pet projects was the publishing of a book in 2008. The school received grants, hosted six campouts and children worked alongside scientists in mapping out the forest then putting that information in a book. It is still available today and is used by students at MRIS as well as other local schools.

Pam cited the book – and the fact it was still circulating – among her key achievements and said another, more generally-speaking, was the opportunity to peer-mentor other teachers and have the information then flow into other schools and organisations.

“What we’re doing here is honouring the bushland around us,” she said. “We want to inspire kids with nature ... and help them understand the forests are a really magical place.”

