

SunSmart Schools

Tips for implementation

This resource has been developed from the experience of five Auckland/Northland schools that have successfully implemented a SunSmart policy and aims to help other schools with their own policy. This case study highlights the steps these schools took to implement their policy, any challenges that they faced, and what they did to overcome these.



The SunSmart Schools Programme

The purpose of this document is to share the successes of schools who have implemented the Cancer Society's SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme with schools that are starting out on the SunSmart journey. Five different schools in Northland/Auckland were interviewed about what steps they took to achieve SunSmart accreditation, what they found difficult and what their top tips are for programme implementation.

This document is split into five themes: hats, shade, communication, outdoor activity rescheduling and curriculum. You can pick out the best information to suit your school's needs.



SunSmart schools background

Skin cancers are the most common form of cancer in New Zealand. The incidence of melanoma skin cancer in New Zealand is among the highest in the world. The SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme provides Cancer Society approved guidelines on how to keep students and the school community safe from the harms of the sun.

To be accredited, schools are required to develop and implement a sun protection policy in Terms 1 and 4 that meet the Cancer Society's criteria.

The four main areas a school's sun protection policy should cover are:

- **Behaviour** – use of wide-brimmed hats, wearing protective clothing and using broad spectrum SPF 30 or more sunscreen on exposed skin.
- **Environment** – providing shade and rescheduling activities outside peak UV periods (10am – 4pm).
- **Curriculum** – including SunSmart in the curriculum at every year level.
- **Policy review** – undertaking a review at least three yearly.

Find more information on the SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme at
www.sunsmartschools.co.nz

Hats

Why hats are important:

Wearing a hat is one of four SunSmart behaviours recommended by the Cancer Society to protect the neck, ears, and face, which are exposed to more UV than other parts of the body. Between 10am and 4pm in Terms 1 and 4, hats should always be worn.

Not all hats are alike. Many hats offer limited protection from the sun. It's important that your school's hat policy requires hats to be SunSmart.

Find out about which hats are SunSmart here:
www.sunsmartschools.co.nz/schools/hats

Hot hat tips from our schools:

- Consistency is key! If you let one child outside without a hat you will get others. If it's Term 1 or 4, even if it's not sunny, it's the rule. Stick to it.
- The hats policy must be strictly enforced if it's going to work. This may mean needing another teacher on duty. The strict enforcement of 'no-hat-play-in-the-shade' means that if children do not have hats they will ask their parents for one.
- Get children to name their hats and leave them at school - this means they are less likely to get lost.
- If you are concerned about students being inactive while in the shade, it is possible to hold activities such as Jump Jam in covered areas.
- Ideally uniform hats are best as it is hard to monitor which hats are SunSmart when children bring in their own choice of hat.
- Bucket hats can be cheaper than broad-brimmed. If finances are an issue for parents, it may be better to use this type.
- Having a set of spare hats available to lend to children can be a good idea.
- It can sometimes be difficult to make sure children without hats are playing in the shade; a fixed area such as a school hall can make this easier.
- All teachers must role model wearing SunSmart hats while outside. It can be a good idea to have a spare hat supply for teachers.



Glenbrae Primary School girls in their uniform hats

Wesley Primary School on hats:

Wesley Primary School (a decile 1 school) was concerned about the cost of hats for their community. To make it easier for parents, the school purchased 200 hats from a clearance outlet and sold these at cost to the children.

Principal Rae Parkin says strictly enforcing hat-wearing is key to the success of the policy. "It didn't take as long to get the children into the brimmed hats as we thought. After two weeks of playing in the shaded area, they didn't like it. As soon as we told children they weren't allowed to be in the playground if they didn't have a SunSmart hat, they started wearing them."

"With the teachers I had a struggle with one or two wearing brimmed hats. And I said 'You've got to, because that's what we want the children to do.' I have several hats that the staff can borrow if they want to. As teachers, I believe that whatever you expect the children to do you should do yourself."

"You've got to be quite persistent with it."

- Principal Rae Parkin, Wesley Primary

"We talked to the kids about why we needed to wear hats. If hats were not worn at the designated time, then the kids were not allowed to play in the sun and had to stay on the verandas. Kids now wear them for all outside activities during the peak UV periods. Kids are now on board and police themselves often. Our kids now 'own' the hats."

- Deputy Principal Lisa Murray, Ahipara School

Shade

Why shade is important:

Shade provides the best protection from UV radiation. During Terms 1 and 4, it is important that children are encouraged to utilise shade as much as possible such as when eating lunch, or enjoying outdoor activities. Increasing shade and using existing shade in your school provides the best protection for your students.

Smart shade tips from our schools:

- Get children to eat their lunch in the shade.
- Make the most of the shade that you do have, both built (e.g. verandas) and natural (ie. trees).
- For outdoor activities/events that must be held between 10am and 4pm make sure children are able to access shade. Shade structures such as gazebos may be useful for this.
- Make shade development part of any rebuild in your school (balconies are a great source of shade for students).
- Plant trees! Although they take a while to grow, this can be a great activity for your students and a great way to introduce long lasting shade.
- Make indoor space available at lunchtime.

Shade design:

It is best to consult the experts when you are building shade. There are many factors to consider when designing shade such as the sun's path, whether the shade is 'warm shade' or 'cool shade', the type of materials used, and any maintenance issues.

Find more information about shade design at:
www.sunsmartschools.co.nz/schools/shade

Funding:

Building shade can be expensive but is important if you don't have enough shade available. There are various grants that schools can apply for. Ask your local library for access to Fundview, the central database for grants available in New Zealand.

A sample funding support letter is available at:
www.sunsmartschools.co.nz/schools/shade/implementation

School fundraisers are another great way to raise money for shade.

Ruakaka Primary School on shade:

Ruakaka Primary, based in Northland, has made shade a priority in their school.

The school has applied for various grants to create sunshade over the main play areas of the school grounds. In addition, when Ruakaka Primary did a redesign, large decks with verandas were built around all the classrooms to increase shade.

"We are always looking for ways that we can increase the shade. We have planted just about everywhere we can. The main areas that the kids play are the playgrounds and the sandpit which are covered by shade sails. All our building projects involve putting a veranda up- any modernisation we do will include a deck with a veranda."

In addition, staff ensure that shade is taken into consideration with outdoor activities:

"When we have our outdoor events we take gazebos that we had made up so that the children can sit in the shade. We also ensure that we find shady areas that the children can sit in."

- Principal Marilyn Dunn, Ruakaka School



Ruakaka School children showing off their shade

Communication

Why communication is important:

Good communication of the SunSmart policy is fundamental to its success. It is important that staff, students and whānau know about the policy and why it is being put in place if it is to be effective.

Communicating to whānau:

In general parents are very supportive of SunSmart policies, often they are the ones that push for the policy to be put in place!

Tips from our schools:

- When launching the policy, it's important that you inform parents at either a meeting or in the school's newsletter. Ruakaka School held a SunSmart celebration day and invited parents to participate. Everyone decorated their own hats and a hat parade was held!
- Inform all new parents about the SunSmart policy at enrolment. Have the policy in the enrolment pack.
- Regularly publicise and reinforce the SunSmart policy (for example through newsletters, school website, parent meetings, and student/teacher activities).



Wesley Primary School children learning about UV radiation

"We regularly communicate with our parents and community through our newsletter by providing SunSmart messaging and reminding them what happens in Ahipara School. We are clear about expectations at the beginning of every year and at the time we enrol kids."

- Principal Jackie Osborne, Ahipara School

Communicating to students:

Children need to understand what the SunSmart rules are and why they are important.

Tips from our schools:

- Make it fun: Hold a hat day or SunSmart celebration day to launch the policy.
- Get the student health team to present the SunSmart policy to the school at assembly.
- Get teachers to remind children about the policy in class.
- Make SunSmart announcements at school events.



Kauriwhore School children sitting under their shade sails for lunch

Communicating to staff:

It is absolutely crucial to have staff buy-in to the SunSmart policy. If staff are all supportive they are going to be more proactive about enforcing the policy. It is important that staff know why you are introducing the policy and what their role is in supporting/enforcing the policy. It is also important that staff know their responsibility in role modelling SunSmart behaviours and that they are on board with this.

Wesley Primary School on communication:

Wesley Primary School has had a SunSmart policy for a while, but just hadn't enforced it. It was important to let parents and staff know that things were changing around the school.

"I gave parents a copy of the policy at the fono and hui meeting. The school community thought it was a good idea. They all like it- they like all that healthy stuff. The parents were fine. And even if they did have a problem then I would just do it anyway. These things are important for the children's health."

In addition to the launch, the policy was regularly reinforced to parents "Every two weeks we put a message in the newsletter talking about the hats. You've got to be quite persistent with it."

- Principal Rae Parkin, Wesley Primary

Outdoor activities/events

Why reschedule?

UV radiation is strongest between September and April (Terms 4 and 1) between the hours of 10am and 4pm. UV radiation is not obvious because it cannot be felt, is invisible and its effects are delayed. So while it may not feel hot, the UV is still powerful at these times.

How?

Rescheduling activities to outside peak UV times doesn't have to be complicated. What we have learnt from talking to schools is that if teachers understand the SunSmart policy, they are happy to reorganise their timetable.

Rescheduling activities before 10am is not always going to be possible, but keeping them as far as possible from the peak UV time is recommended, e.g. 10.30am is high UV, but it won't be as strong as at 1-1.30pm when UV is at extreme levels.

If an outside activity does occur between 10am and 4pm make sure you consider other sun protection strategies such as enforcing hats, providing sunscreen, holding activities in shaded areas or making sure children are in the shade when not participating in (unavoidable) unshaded activities.

Rescheduling tips from our schools:

- Hold twilight swimming sports carnivals- that way families can attend after work.
- Have sports carnivals in Term 3 rather than 4.
- Hold outdoor activities as far from solar noon as possible.
- Have a longer morning tea break, and shorter lunch break.
- Schedule morning tea break a little later, so that lunch can be held a little later (on either side of solar noon).
- Eat lunch together as a class indoors or in the shade.



Fun in the shade: Ahipara Primary School children



Glenbrae Primary on outdoor activities:

Glenbrae Primary school, based in Glen Innes, Auckland has prioritised making their outdoor activities safer for their children.

"I thought the teachers might be unhappy about rescheduling outdoor activities to the morning as this could interfere with literacy programmes, but they have just taken it on board, it's not been an issue."

One example of rescheduling was the timing of Glenbrae's water fun day "We hold the water fun day at the beginning of each year where the children try and put as much water into a bucket as they can for their house through various fun activities. We used to start at 11.30am and go until 1pm but now we start at 9.15am and go until 10.30am. The children come in togs and we tell them to wear t-shirts in their house colours which gives them additional protection. We also provide sunscreen and enforce hat wearing."

"We also have shorter lunchtimes which I think is quite a SunSmart thing to do and we have longer playtimes earlier."

- Principal Lesley Elia, Glenbrae Primary

"We provide sunscreen for outdoor activities, we have three gazebos, and have put an old bus shelter on the sports field so people can sit under that. We also try and plan around the sun: we now hold athletics early in the morning, as opposed to after lunch. We also had a kapa haka performance the other day under the trees out the back so that the students would be in the shade."

- Chrissie Baddeley, Kaurihohore Primary

Curriculum



Why put SunSmart in the curriculum?

From an early age our children need to have the knowledge and behaviours that will protect them from harmful UV radiation. Putting SunSmart in the curriculum is the best way to ensure students learn about this harm and how to avoid it.

Cognition Education has developed a set of SunSmart curriculum resources for the Cancer Society for levels 1-4 of the New Zealand curriculum.

These resources address numeracy, literacy, health and science learning and are available online at:

www.sunsmartschools.org.nz/teachers/curriculum-resources

Ahipara School on Curriculum:

Ahipara School principal, Jackie Osborne says that educating students about why they should be SunSmart is key for the success of the policy and the health outcomes of the children. "SunSmart is planned into the curriculum every year and the curriculum content is reviewed every two years.

Rather than stand-alone teaching, it is integrated into all areas of the curriculum. As an example we did "Keeping Ourselves Safe" last year and we extended this to cover all areas of safety including a keeping safe in the sun component, and why this is important."

- Principal Jackie Osborne, Ahipara School

"Teachers talking through the reasons for being SunSmart and making sure children really understand is extremely important. We talk about it at assembly and have short lessons on maintaining SunSmart habits so that it's habitual. SunSmart needs to be in the curriculum so that children know why this is being put in place."

- Principal Lesley Elia, Glenbrae Primary

Overall tips?

Ahipara school:

Be bold and do it

- Get buy-in across all sectors of the school.
- Have clear expectations – “this is what we are going to do and this is why we need to do it”.
- Develop a consistent and united approach across the whole school.

Glenbrae school:

Communication is key

- Put SunSmart in the curriculum so that children know why it's being put in place.
- Start putting the procedures in place as you are going along.
- Keep parents updated with SunSmart progress in the school's newsletter.
- Have a very strict hat policy. This requires more resource (another teacher is on duty every day) . The policy needs to be strict enough so that children don't get away with being in the sun without hats.

Wesley Primary:

Don't make hats a barrier

- Source cheap hats.
- Make sure you've got your staff, your community and your Board all “on board”.
- Use Cancer Society as a resource. They will help you out, be really positive, and help you do your policy.

Kaurihohore Primary:

Be consistent

- Be consistent with the kids. If you let one kid go out without a hat, you're going to get ten.
- Be consistent with your rules around sunscreen and hats.
- Even if it's not sunny or it is cold, if it's Term 1 and 4 you need to stick to the rule.

Ruakaka Primary:

Plan around the sun

You have to be thinking of the sun all the time:

- Are the kids protected from the sun?
- Is this the best time of the day to be doing this activity?
- Do the parents know that the children have to be protected from the sun?

It's about being able to convince people that this is important.

If you need any information about being a SunSmart school or need advice about implementing a SunSmart policy please contact us at **healthpromotion@akcansoc.org.nz** (Auckland), **northland@akcansoc.org.nz** (Northland) or refer to our website **www.sunsmartschools.co.nz**