

Nature Explorers



PARENTS HANDBOOK

THE NATURE EXPLORERS PROGRAM

The Nature Explorers program began in 2016, when the educators of Pottsville Community Preschool felt the urgency of developing a Nature Based Program for the children in the preschool and the wider community.

Nature Explorers is aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework and aims to enhance early learning experiences. In addition, we aim to have a positive influence in children's health, growth and development, while planting the seeds for their understanding of sustainability and conservation.

Each day may include opportunities such as;

- Children engage in physical play and movement – walking to site, running across the dunes, balancing on logs, digging holes in the sand, constructing and building cubbies and shelters. Each activity involves skill development and learning as they build muscles and coordination.
- Children draw on nature to be creative every day, whether that is making 3d sculptures from sticks, leaves, bark and flowers, or creating drawings in the sand or mud. They often use our clipboards and bush books to plan designs or document their creations, maps or signs. They engage in early literacy experiences as they do with numeracy as they measure the height of trees, the length of logs, or count the berries they collect.
- Educators support children to develop safe practice as they engage in bushcraft - using real tools to cut, saw, chop, whittle, or carve in natural logs. They practise a range of knot tying and use these skills to construct swings, ladders, and shelters.
- The children develop strong connections within the community as they contribute through local programs of rubbish collecting, weeding, dune care, planting and nature research. The sustainable practices allow children to feel a great sense of pride in looking after their hometown and developing lifelong skills.

Nature Explorers acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land in which we play and learn, the people of the Bundjalung nation. The educator team aims to work collaboratively with Bundjalung people within the community to honour their strong connection with land and water. Nature Explorers aims to embed learning opportunities to promote greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being.

SESSION DAYS AND TIMES 2026

Nature Explorers Community operates Monday/Tuesdays and Thursday/Friday (NSW School terms only). For children ages 3-5 years

Nature Explorers Community - Monday & Tuesday: 8.00am – 3.30pm (can be dropped off from 8am and picked up from 2-3.30pm)

Wednesday (Preschool enrolled children only) 9.00am – 2.00pm

Nature Explorers Community- Thursday & Friday: 8.00am – 3.30pm (can be dropped off from 8am and picked up from 2 - 3.30pm)

SETTLING IN

Settling into an early education service, such as Nature Explorers, is a unique experience for each child and family. At Nature Explorers Educators will work collaboratively with our families to ensure each child feels comfortable, settled and builds secure relationships with consistent Educators.

Educators will provide families with strategies if they are concerned about their child's emotional well-being whilst settling into Nature Explorers routines.

COMMUNICATION

Educators will communicate with families on a daily basis face to face, to share information about the child's day and relevant session information.

Nature Explorer families will have access to general information via OWNA our communication application, this will provide important information about that group – documentation via movies and photos, where the next session is, reminders of what to bring, as well as weather updates the night prior to the session if necessary.

We ask families to always have their mobile phones with them and turned on throughout the duration of the Nature Explorers sessions to be easily contactable when necessary and aware of any updates throughout the session.

WHAT TO WEAR AND PACK

All children attending Nature Explorers are required to wear long pants, closed in shoes and socks and a T-shirt that covers the shoulders.

Each child is required to have a backpack which they will need to carry to the site.

The backpack will need to include the following items:

- Water bottle of fresh water at all sessions. There will be access to drinking water to supplement this when required on each site.
- Food - a sealed container with their lunch and a morning snack. An icepack. We encourage families to consider providing a litterless healthy lunch.
- A full change of clothes and a wet bag.

PLEASE NOTE WE ARE A NUT FREE PROGRAM INCLUDING NUT BUTTERS.

Nature Explorers will provide Sunscreen and Insect Repellent and a Nature Explorers red hat to be returned at the end of each session. Please ensure that you apply sunscreen and insect repellent to your child prior to the session commencing. These will be reapplied during sessions.

Nature Explorers will provide wet weather gear for Preschool and Community groups usage during their sessions.

MEAL TIMES

At Nature Explorers, children are encouraged to eat when they are hungry. As each individual household has different routines, these are respected and acknowledged by offering children the opportunity to eat when they are hungry. We acknowledge that some children wake early and may eat breakfast early, therefore, will be eager to eat their morning tea quite early. Of course, the opposite applies for those children that might wake later and be looking to eat their morning tea later in the morning.

Educators check children's lunch boxes to ensure that children have eaten and drunk water.

SIGN IN/OUT

Nature Explorers and Pottsville Preschool currently use the OWNA – Childcare Management App. This application allows for Educators and families to communicate easily and effectively through real time access to your

child's data including images and videos, digital attendances (including time in/out & digital signatures), as well as notifications about posts, and important notices like incident reports, forms etc. All parents and carers are given a login username, PIN and passcode by the Preschool.

Whomever brings your child to Preschool or collects your child from Preschool must sign the child in/out using OWNA, an authorised person for pick up must be over 18 years of age.

When you arrive at Nature Explorers and have signed in your child will collect their red hat. The children are in the care of the educators at Nature Explorers from this point. They must stay behind the red roped boundary area for safety. Sign out occurs when you pick up the child, red hat is returned and you take responsibility for your child.

NATURE EXPLORERS SITES

The Nature Explorers - Pottsville Community Preschool program is fortunate to have available several different and highly rich locations. The main sites used are:

‘Base Camp’ – community owned land adjacent to the Preschool.

‘The dunes’ - both the bush regeneration area and the dunes off Elfran Avenue, Pottsville.

Pottsville Environmental park – Centennial Drive, Pottsville

Hastings Point Creek - Peninsula Street

Hastings Point Dune Care

Spotty’s Crossing - Cudgera Avenue, Pottsville

TOILETS

Children’s physical needs will be catered to during the sessions.

Educators support children to use the Pottsville Community Preschool toilets prior to their session.

A chemical toilet will be taken to site as deemed necessary by educators.

Educators will attend to any children requiring assistance. When a session takes place at the Environmental Park, Hastings Headland or Hastings Dune Care children and educators may be able to use the toilet facilities available on site.

MEDICAL NEEDS

Medication forms can be completed digitally by families at the service upon arrival.

Parents/carers of children who have medical needs including anaphylaxis or asthma must ensure they discuss their action plans with educators prior to commencing the first session. Families will be required to provide medication and action plans, specifically for the Nature Explorer's session.

Administration of medication will be followed as per Pottsville Community Preschools policy and procedure.

In the case of a child getting a tick during a session, Educators will not remove the tick. Parents will be called and advised to get medical advice on tick removal.

FURTHER POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Nature Explorers is conducted as part of the Pottsville Community Preschool program therefore is governed by the regulations and procedures of the Preschool. Please see policies on the OWNA Application under useful documents for more information.

WEATHER

Weather information will be obtained from the Bureau of Meteorology website. At all times we will err on the side of caution.

In the case of extreme weather, information will be posted on Owna. Every effort will be made to notify families in advance if a session requires cancellation.

SESSION CANCELLATION

Nature Explorers sessions may be cancelled ahead of time due to extreme weather or other circumstances. If during the Nature Explorers Session, there is a need to evacuate or an emergency, the children will be moved to the evacuation points appropriate for the location they are visiting.

Nature Explorers may operate sessions out of Pottsville Preschool in case of extreme weather.

Explorers Day- A Flexible Routine

8:00 – 9:00 am | Arrival

- Families arrive with children at the pre-determined location (as advised on OWNA).
- Families sign children in for attendance using the OWNA app, and apply sunscreen and insect repellent.
- Explorers set boundaries using six red ropes.

- Explorers set up the site as needed, including tarps for seating and shade, a water station, a tool area, and play resources.

Play and Learning

- Unstructured play – Explorers choose how they wish to spend their time.
- Explorers eat according to their own bodily needs. They generally enjoy a morning snack after the site is set up, followed by play, and later a lunch snack. Explorers usually sit together on the mat or in small groups on site.
- Educators are responsive to the children’s needs and interests, extending on these through play and conversation. Educators will also facilitate planned learning experiences from previous sessions.

Pack-Up

- Explorers help pack up the site.
- The group walks or takes the bus back to Headquarters (Preschool).
- Children carry their own backpacks and assist with pulling or pushing the buddy.

Approximately 1:00 pm | Return to Headquarters

- Explorers arrive back at Headquarters.
- Relax and have lunch.
- Engage in play and planned activities at Headquarters.

2:00 – 3:30 pm | Pick-Up

- Educators share insights from the day with families.
- Explorers return their red hats to educators as families sign out on OWNA.
- Children are then the responsibility of their parents.