

Site 117. Schools

This section refers to native vegetation in schools that are not recognised as sites, or parts of sites, described earlier in this report.

Site Significance Level: *Local*

Many school grounds in Knox have remnant trees, which provide shade and can add to the attractiveness of what might otherwise be a rather stark landscape. Sometimes there are also patches of native understorey, or areas of hardy native grasses such as Weeping Grass or Clustered Wallaby-grass.

The more biologically important vegetation in school grounds is covered earlier in this report. Other native vegetation in schools seen during this study is too isolated or too sparse to warrant the application of an overlay in the Knox Planning Scheme. The school properties are larger than 0.4 ha and so they are subject to the baseline 'native vegetation retention' provisions of Clause 52.17 of the Victoria Planning Provisions. While small-scale vegetation removal at schools is generally done with planning approval, this does not always apply because planning schemes are not binding on land development carried out on behalf of the Minister for Education due to an Order-in-Council under Section 16 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Victorian Govt Gazette, 10th February 1988, p. 266).

Construction of buildings is a possible cause for future loss of native vegetation in these schools, particularly with a large provision of federal funds for school improvements in 2010. A state-wide amendment to clause 52.17 in 2008 introduced a level of planning control over native vegetation removal for building construction. Hopefully, school construction projects would only remove native vegetation if there were no practicable alternative.

The most important example of a school with native vegetation is Mountain Gate Primary School. It has an area of approximately 0.25 ha with a fair to good cover of remnant trees, and with native understorey restricted to a few Sweet Bursaria shrubs and ground layer plants around the base of remnant trees. This area is at the southwestern end of the school grounds adjacent to Ashton Road, where it seems unlikely that new school buildings would be placed because of remoteness from the existing school buildings.

A major feature of conservation significance in these schools is their eucalypts and large wattles. All indigenous eucalypt species in Knox, as well as *Acacia mearnsii* and *Acacia melanoxylon*, meet the international criteria for locally threatened species (Volume 1) and any viable population is of 'Local' conservation significance according to the criteria of the Department of Sustainability & Environment (Amos 2004). These species are common in school grounds.