Pomona State School began its journey with KidsMatter Primary in 2007 when it participated in the pilot phase in 2007. Since that time the focus on social and emotional learning has grown through the curriculum and other initiatives in the school community.

Creating a garden
In 2011 staff members discussed ideas about using the school grounds to create a defined space. They wanted to provide students with experiences to make links between social and emotional learning and the environment. Out of the discussions, emerged the Sensory Garden.

The Sensory Garden has been a long-term project which first broke ground in 2011. One of the important aspects of the garden was using recycled materials which fitted with the environmental focus of the school.

Components in the garden
The design of the garden allows students to experience the components of Kids Matter through the senses. It is an excellent way to teach about social and emotional learning through the themed spaces and items.

... The ‘Let Go’ logs help students let go of emotions that may stop them from moving forward. The uneven climbing logs give the idea that life has ups and downs and that it is okay like that. The ‘Cross Over’ bridge shows students that they can make different choices. The ‘Sit and Think’ seat is a place to reflect and share ideas. While the ‘Whispering Wishing Well’ is a focus for students to set goals and engage in positive thinking.

Shaylene Brock,
Teacher Assistant

... I didn’t have much trouble having people accept the idea. The garden picked up on the buzz around the school about Kids Matter. We thought it might be possible to incorporate elements of emotional wellbeing in the garden and the experience of being in a carefully planned natural environment in the school grounds.

Shaylene Brock,
Teacher Assistant

The involvement of parents and connection to Component 3 is evident when students explain the features of the garden to their parents. They use language that reflects their learning about wellbeing.

Jacquelyn Wright,
Acting Head, Student Services

... This garden is an outdoor learning area that has been designed not only to stimulate the senses but also to incorporate social and emotional development. [It supports] the school’s expectation statement, ‘Care for self, others, learning and the environment’.

Shaylene Brock,
Teacher Assistant
Garden as classroom
Classes use the Sensory Garden for different lessons. For example, the Prep and Year 1 students used it recently for a Maths lesson. Each student was given a metre length of string for a series of measurements. An older group of students observed and described the complexity of a plant or flower as the basis for a piece of creative writing. A Science class has used the garden for seed germination. Students have learned about the value of recycling materials and the creativity in turning items into new uses. For example, a concrete pipe became the Whispering Wishing Well, and decommissioned bus shelters were used for the ‘Sit & Think’ seat and outdoor chessboard cover.

The impact of the garden
The school community has been involved in developing the garden. Wider community members, including artists and the local Council contributed resources, and some parents gave donations. During its 16 month creation, students watched the elements and items taking shape. Lines on the ground before one holiday period became a large (and friendly) three-dimensional dragon. Teachers observe students taking on new challenges in the garden. They can play with a large chess set; there are opportunities for cognitive and experiential thinking and for the quiet space of reflection. And it’s interesting that all age groups of students enjoy the garden. Students are supervised in the garden and respect it as a significant place for learning, and experiencing nature.

The Garden Club
The Garden Club operates at lunchtimes, and students volunteer to water, plant and mulch under the supervision of one of the Teacher Assistants who is committed to developing the school gardens. Among the volunteers are some students who are less able to settle in class and who may experience difficulties with interactions.

Environmental plan
One of the expectations of Pomona is that students will care for the environment. The first Environmental Plan 2011 – 2013 sets out concepts and strategies for the school community to care for the environment, conserve water and use energy efficiently. In 2012 the Eco Warriors program was initiated. During Term 3 this year a group of eleven Year 7 Eco-Warriors attended the regional Kids in Action Environmental Conference with a large number of students from schools in the region to learn and share ideas about making the environment more sustainable.

... I see a difference in those students in the Garden Club. They are happy and engage with the activities and the purpose of the garden. I think they can learn a lot from nature. There are life messages in nature about growing and changing; observing and understanding what wellbeing means for plants and wildlife. I blow the whistle at lunchtime for the start of Garden Club, and 40 kids might run to the gate ready for the tasks!

Shaylene Brock,
Teacher Assistant

The Sensory Garden is a practical application of the Environmental Plan and it reinforces the school’s approach to teaching and learning about emotional wellbeing.

Pomona State School
Queensland

- Is located about 166 kms north of Brisbane
- Enrols 300 students from Preparatory to Year 7
- Promotes the values statement, Care for self, others, learning and the environment
- Has a strong focus on the environment

http://pomonass.eq.edu.au/wcms