

# Strong strides together

Meeting the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



## Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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## Author

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For more information about this report, please contact:

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation  
Department of Education  
GPO Box 33  
Sydney NSW 2001

[info@cese.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@cese.nsw.gov.au)

+61 2 7814 1527

[education.nsw.gov.au/cese](http://education.nsw.gov.au/cese)

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We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	5
Key educational policies and frameworks	7
Using this resource with the School Success Model	8
Key Australian Government and NSW Government educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students	9
Creating high-quality learning environments	10
The relationship between cultural identity and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes	12
<b>Culturally safe schools</b>	16
Defining culturally safe schools	17
What the evidence says	17
Key pathways	20
Resources	23
<b>Culturally responsive teaching</b>	24
Defining culturally responsive teaching	25
What the evidence says	26
Key pathways	28
Resources	31
<b>Positive relationships</b>	32
Defining positive relationships	33
What the evidence says	33
Key pathways	35
Resources	38

<b>Personalised learning</b>	39
Defining personalised learning	40
What the evidence says	41
Key pathways	43
Resources	46
<b>Appendix A: Links between the NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy statement and themes</b>	47
<b>Appendix B: Links between the NSW AECG Inc. Partnership Agreement 2020-2030 specific outcomes and themes</b>	51
<b>References</b>	53
<b>About the artworks</b>	57

## **| List of figures and tables**

<b>Figure 1</b> Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' aspirations to go to university and feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021	13
<b>Figure 2</b> Wellbeing measures by feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021	14
<b>Figure 3</b> Engagement measures by feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021	15
<b>Table 1</b> Links to NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy	47
<b>Table 2</b> Links to NSW AECG Inc. Partnership Agreement 2020-2030	51



## Introduction

In line with the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration (Council of Australian Governments Education Council 2019), the NSW Department of Education (the department) is committed to the inherent right of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to fair, equitable, culturally inclusive and significant educational opportunities.

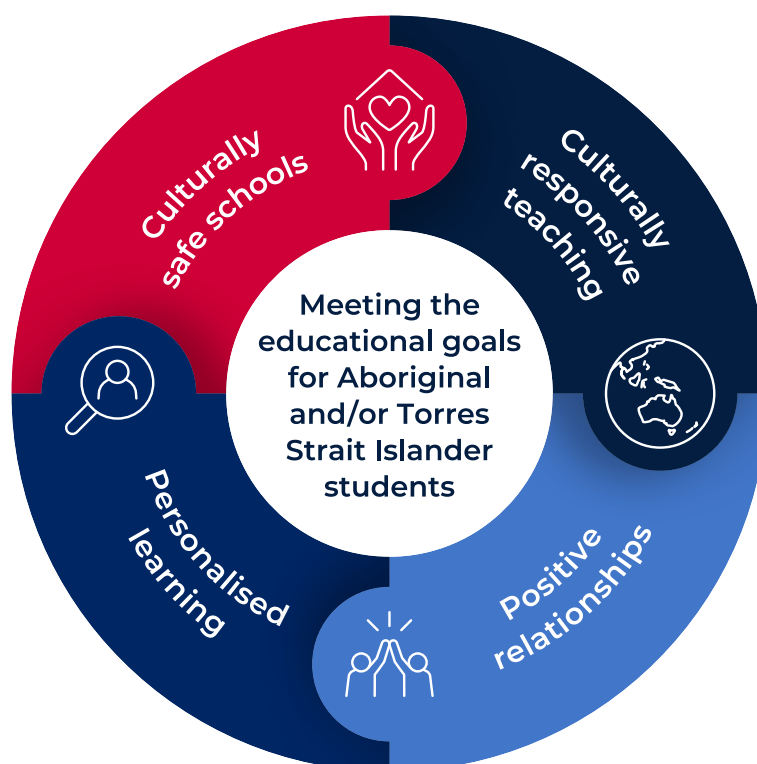
Schools play a central role in the day-to-day educational experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. The commitment of teachers and school leaders to sustained positive change is a critical factor in ensuring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students have access to high-quality learning environments. This paper has been developed to support teachers and school leaders to enact this commitment.

The paper begins by outlining current policies and frameworks that should inform teachers and school leaders when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. These policies and frameworks provide the foundation for promoting the success of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in school.

The paper then outlines the evidence for 4 underlying themes that can support teachers and school leaders to create high-quality learning environments and meet the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Kindergarten to Year 12):

- culturally safe schools
- culturally responsive teaching
- positive relationships
- personalised learning.

A summary of the evidence for each theme is accompanied by practical pathways that teachers and school leaders can implement in their schools.



### A note about terminology

This resource uses the terminology 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' to refer to people and communities who are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Where the word 'Indigenous' is used in this resource, it reflects the terminology used in the cited documents.

## Key educational policies and frameworks

There are 2 guiding educational policies and frameworks for NSW schools when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and around Aboriginal education: the NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy (the policy) and the NSW Department of Education and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Inc. Partnership Agreement 2020-2030: Walking Together, Working Together (the partnership agreement). These documents require teachers and school leaders to keep Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students front of mind in their planning, leadership and teaching. One aim of this paper is to support teachers and school leaders to meet the commitments outlined in the policy and the partnership agreement.

### The Aboriginal Education Policy

The policy is the principal document that defines the department's commitments to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal education in its schools. The policy was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and key partners. The policy should underpin and inform planning, teaching practice and approaches to educational leadership, in partnership with the NSW AECG Inc. and local Aboriginal communities. Each policy point has been mapped to the themes in this paper that most closely align to it, to assist schools to engage with the policy (Appendix A). Further information about the policy is available on the [Aboriginal Education Policy](#) page of the department's website.

#### **Turning Policy into Action: enacting the policy through the School Excellence Framework**

The Turning Policy into Action guide (the guide) was developed to support the implementation of the policy across the department. The guide contains examples of good practice strategies and actions that can be used in schools. Principals can use the guide to complete a 'reflect, plan, act' process that is aligned to the School Excellence Framework domains of excellence in learning, excellence in teaching and excellence in leading. The [Turning Policy Into Action guide](#) is available on the department's website.

### The Partnership Agreement 2020-2030: Walking Together, Working Together

The partnership agreement outlines the shared commitment of the NSW Department of Education and NSW AECG Inc. to ensuring that every Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child and young person in NSW achieves their potential through education (NSW Department of Education 2020a). The partnership agreement identifies specific outcomes for schools, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, non-Aboriginal students, teachers and other staff. Each outcome has been mapped to the themes in this paper that most closely align to it, to assist schools to engage with the partnership agreement (Appendix B). More information about the partnership agreement is available on the [Working in partnership with the NSW AECG Inc.](#) page of the department's website and on the [Partnership agreement](#) page of the NSW AECG Inc. website.

## Using this resource with the School Success Model

The practices identified in this paper are most effective when implemented as planned, whole-school approaches. As part of the School Success Model processes, school leaders can use this paper in combination with the School Excellence Framework (SEF), the Turning Policy into Action guide, and the What works best 2020 update to inform continuous school improvement planning around enacting the policy. The [Developing improvement measures for Aboriginal students](#) page of the department's website has further information about continuous school improvement planning.

### Assess student need

Identify areas of improvement using the SEF self-assessment and the guide.



### Plan for improvement

Decide on actions the school will take to improve in the areas identified through the SEF self-assessment, the guide, the What works best 2020 update and this paper.



### Implement action

Develop a framework for implementation, including the systems, resourcing and other conditions needed to create an expectation that meeting the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students is the responsibility of the whole school community.



### Evaluate progress

Identify how the school will measure success and develop monitoring and evaluation plans.



## Key Australian Government and NSW Government educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students

A number of key educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Kindergarten to Year 12 have been identified in Australian Government and NSW Government documents. This is not an exhaustive list, and many refer to system-level goals. In NSW, schools may be able to adapt these educational goals to inform continuous school improvement planning as part of the School Success Model. It is vital that schools also work with individual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, their families and their communities to develop personalised educational goals.

### Closing the Gap targets and outcomes

#### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

- By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census to 55%.

#### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education

- By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth (aged 15 to 24) who are in employment, education or training to 67%.

#### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential

- By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples (aged 20 to 24) attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualifications to 96%.

### School Success Model target

#### Increase the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining their HSC by 50%, while maintaining their cultural identity (Premier's Priority 2023)

- Individual school network targets in place from 2020 (percentage uplift). Individual school student uplift in place that underpins the network target.

### NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan outcomes

- Increased proportion of Aboriginal students attaining the HSC, while maintaining their cultural identity.
- Reduced gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in literacy and numeracy, as well as sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school.

#### Sources

- [Closing the Gap targets and outcomes](#)
- [School Success Model](#)
- [NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan](#)

## Creating high-quality learning environments

This paper identifies 4 themes from the literature that, when implemented holistically, create and maintain learning environments for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students that enable student success and achievement. The themes are:

### Culturally safe schools



Culturally safe schools recognise that individual students have distinct cultural identities that shape their school experience. They use whole-of-school practices to make students feel welcome and supported, and families and communities feel connected to the school.

### Culturally responsive teaching



Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges that students' cultural backgrounds influence their ways of knowing, thinking and communicating. By understanding and responding to these cultural influences, teachers can promote student learning.

### Personalised learning



Personalised learning approaches tailor learning based on individual student strengths, needs, interests, culture, progress and/or goals. These approaches are grounded in providing students with learning environments that support them to achieve to a high standard.

### Positive relationships



Positive relationships between school staff, students, families and communities are built on shared trust, respect and understanding. They are developed over time, reciprocal and facilitated by school staff through engagement with students, their families and communities.

### Know every student, know your classroom, know your school

An important consideration when using this resource is the varying experiences and backgrounds of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW schools. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples belong to diverse cultural groups with different languages and cultural customs. Students may belong to one or more of these cultural groups, and may attend school on Country (on the lands of their cultural group) or off Country (on the lands of a different cultural group).

The themes outlined in this paper are overarching approaches that can collectively be used to inform school practice. The pathways within each theme can best support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students when teachers and school leaders flexibly implement the practices in response to the specific contexts of individual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and their school or classroom.

## The role of quality teaching in high-quality learning environments

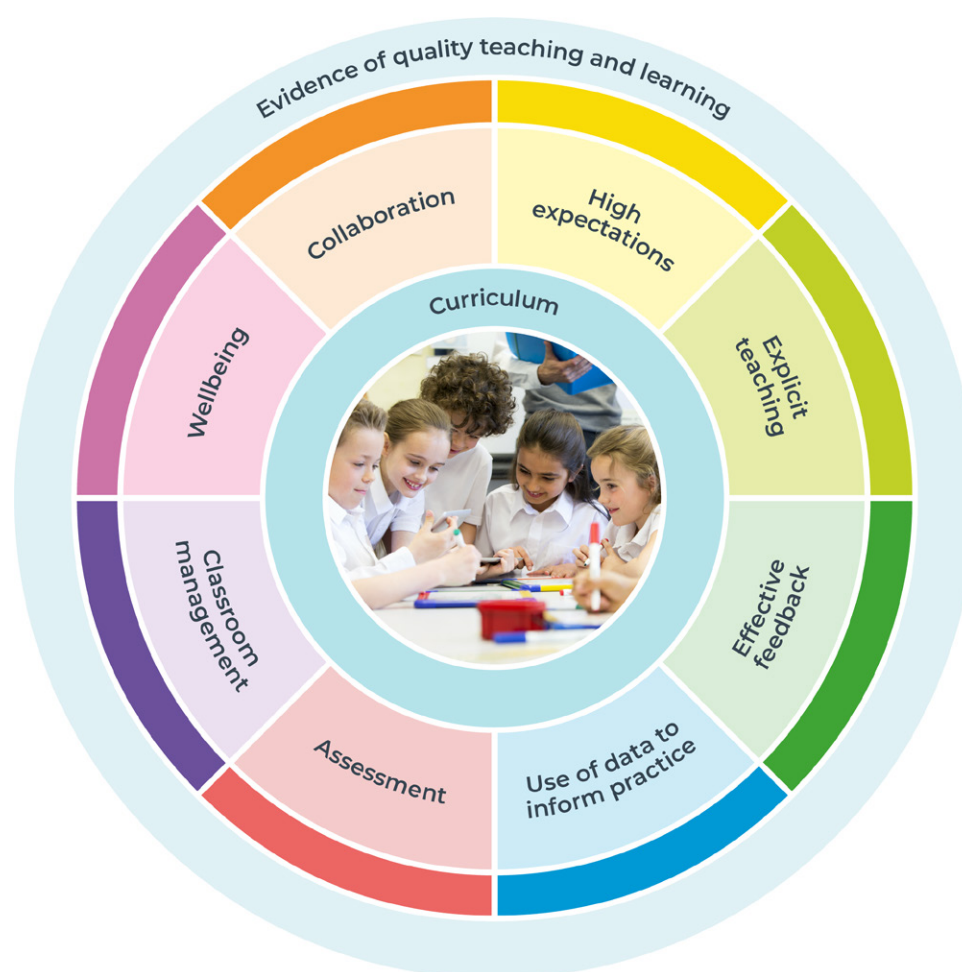
The 4 themes should be used in conjunction with frameworks and resources that promote quality teaching for all students. These include the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the standards) and the What works best 2020 update.

### The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

The standards identify 2 focus areas that can support the implementation of the 4 themes in classrooms. Focus area 1.4 highlights the need for teachers to develop the knowledge and capabilities to teach Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and understand the role that their cultures, cultural identities and linguistic backgrounds have in their educational experiences. Focus area 2.4 describes the responsibility of teachers to promote reconciliation by teaching all students understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultures.

### What works best

The What works best 2020 update outlines 8 quality teaching practices that are known to support school improvement and enhance the learning outcomes of all students. The 8 practices are high expectations, explicit teaching, effective feedback, use of data to inform practice, assessment, classroom management, wellbeing and collaboration. The What works best practices should be used together with the 4 themes identified in this paper to create school learning environments that enhance educational opportunities and experiences for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.





## The relationship between cultural identity and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes

Broad cultural connectedness and positive cultural self-identity have been found to be important considerations for promoting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes (Ockenden 2014). Recognition of the fundamental role cultural identity plays in teaching and learning for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students is evident in the partnership agreement, the NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan and the School Success Model. One aim of this paper is to provide teachers and school leaders with an understanding of the knowledge and capabilities they can build to better support their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' positive sense of cultural self-identity.

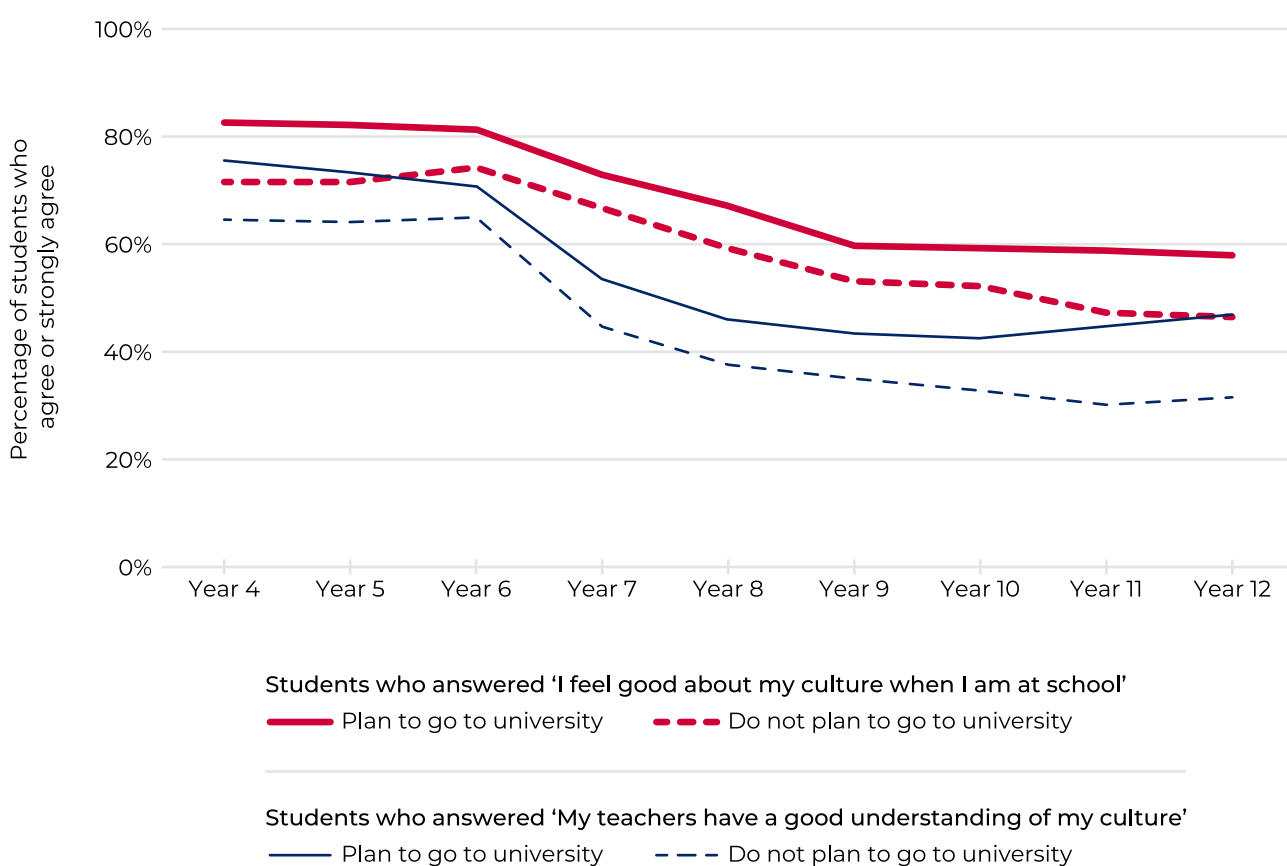
As part of the Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey administered in NSW public schools, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are asked if they feel good about their culture at school and whether their teachers have a good understanding of their culture. The Tell Them From Me data shows the correlation between positive responses on these questions and 3 other interrelated educational outcomes: post-school aspirations, wellbeing and engagement.

## Post-school aspirations

Students who have clear goals for the future are more likely to stay in school to obtain the necessary educational qualifications to pursue those goals post-school (Ockenden 2014; CESE 2021:2). Figure 1 shows Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' aspirations to go to university and their feelings about culture at school.<sup>1</sup> A higher proportion of students who plan to go to university report feeling good about their culture and that their teachers have a good understanding of their culture, compared to students who do not plan to go to university. The gap between the 2 groups increases for both questions as students progress through school.

**Figure 1**

### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' aspirations to go to university and feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021



**Source:** TTFM primary and secondary student surveys, 2021

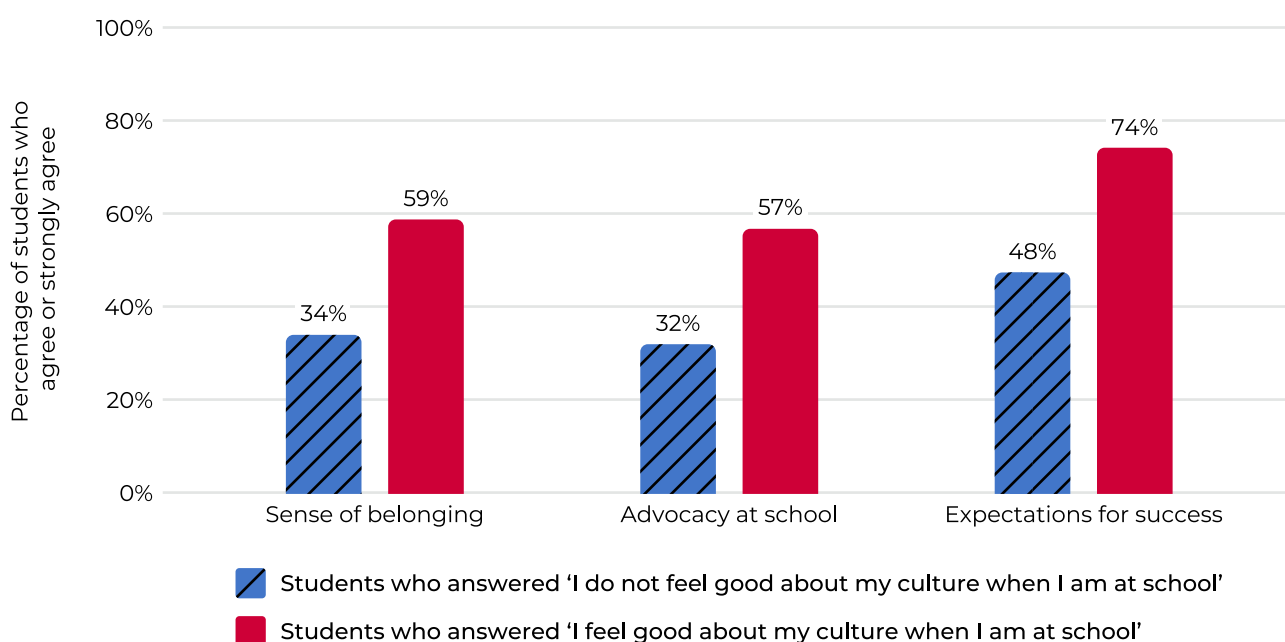
<sup>1</sup> 'Aspirations to go to university' is used as a proxy for further educational aspirations in general as it is the only post-school question asked to both primary and secondary students, and primary school students may not necessarily understand all the different educational pathways available.

## Wellbeing

For all students, higher levels of wellbeing are linked to higher academic achievement, school completion, better overall mental health and a more prosocial and responsible lifestyle (CESE 2020:33). Figure 2 shows that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who report feeling good about their culture at school also report more positive responses on each of the 3 indicators of wellbeing. The pattern of findings shown in Figure 2 is similar for responses to the question 'My teachers have a good understanding about my culture' (not shown), as well as the responses for primary students (not shown).

**Figure 2**

**Wellbeing measures by feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021**

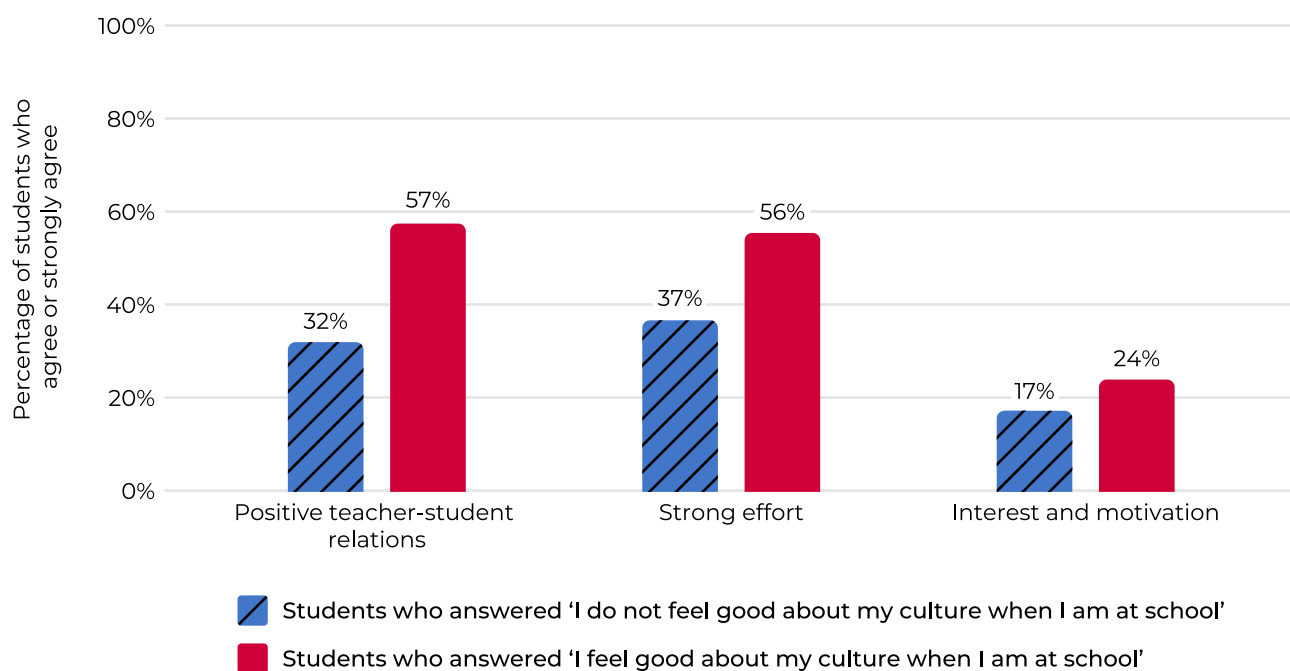


**Source:** TTFM secondary student survey, 2021

## Engagement

A student's active involvement in, and commitment and attention to, academic and non-academic school activities can impact their current and future academic achievement (CESE 2016; CESE 2017). These can be measured as social engagement (for example, relationships with peers and teachers), institutional engagement (attendance and participation at school) and intellectual engagement (interest, motivation and effort in learning) (CESE 2016). Figure 3 shows that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who report feeling good about their culture while at school also report more positive responses on each of the 3 indicators of engagement compared to students who do not feel as good about their culture at school.<sup>2</sup> The pattern of findings is similar for responses to the question 'My teachers have a good understanding about my culture' (not shown), as well as the responses for primary students (not shown).

<sup>2</sup> These indicators of engagement have been chosen to capture social engagement, institutional engagement and intellectual engagement. Interest and motivation tend to be low for all NSW students in secondary school. In 2021, 22.8% of all students reported a positive sense of interest and motivation. This is lower than the percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who felt good about their culture when at school who also reported a positive sense of interest and motivation (24%).

| **Figure 3****Engagement measures by feelings about culture at school, TTFM, 2021**

**Source:** TTFM secondary student survey, 2021

### Promoting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' attendance

Presence in school can positively impact student achievement (for review refer to Ockenden 2014). However, it is important to recognise the difference between being present and engagement (that is, a student may be present but not engaged, or may be absent but still engaged) (SCRCSP 2014).

Recent modelling of TTFM survey data found that for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Year 7, their sense of belonging at school, pride in school, and feeling that teachers understand their culture predicted increases in attendance. For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in Year 9, their feeling that teachers have high expectations for their academic success predicted increases in attendance (for further details refer to CESE 2022).

# Culturally safe schools



## | Key points

- Culturally safe schools provide a safe and supportive environment that enables students' success by ensuring all students feel emotionally, culturally and physically safe at school.
- It is essential that the whole school community engages in ongoing learning to build cultural competency and value and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures.
- Schools may enact cultural safety by building culturally competent staff, ensuring all students learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, creating inclusive school environments and using Reconciliation Action Plans.



## Defining culturally safe schools

Culturally safe schools provide a supportive environment where all students feel emotionally, culturally and physically safe at school (AITSL 2020). Culturally safe schools also recognise that individual students have distinct cultural identities and experiences that shape how they experience the school environment (ACER 2015). Ensuring cultural safety can better facilitate the participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and their families in their schools (NSW AECG Inc. 2021).

There is no single definition of cultural safety in the literature and the term is often used interchangeably with 'cultural responsiveness', 'cultural awareness', 'cultural relevance' and 'cultural competence' (ACER 2015, Morrison et al. 2019). A commonly cited definition of cultural safety is:

**‘an environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what, they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience.’**

**(Williams 1999:213)**

Ensuring cultural safety can be seen to be the collective responsibility of the whole school community, driven by school leaders.

A culturally safe school requires the ongoing learning of cultural competency skills among all students and staff. Cultural competency is 'the ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact across cultures' (FECCA 2019:3). Cultural competency can be thought of as an ethical framework to guide students and staff in their interactions and work within the school. As such, cultural competency involves the whole school community engaging in ongoing learning and reflection about their own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs and then continually applying this learning.

Culturally safe schools are important for all students, but are particularly important for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples may not feel welcome and safe in all school environments due to the influence of historic and systemic exclusion from education, experiences of racism and discrimination, and the existence of deficit views of Aboriginal peoples and cultures (ACER 2015, Morrison et al. 2019, Commonwealth of Australia 2017). Culturally safe schools proactively address these barriers and facilitate connectedness between the school and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, staff, families and communities (Commonwealth of Australia 2017; Rutherford et al. 2020; AITSL 2020).

## What the evidence says

### Culturally safe schools can enable student success and achievement

There is limited research on the direct impact of cultural safety on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. However, cultural safety in schools is argued to provide the foundation for effective education and support programs to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student achievement (Commonwealth of Australia 2017; Ockenden 2014).

When students feel comfortable, supported and welcome at school they are more likely to engage in the classroom, foster positive peer and teacher relationships and feel confident in their cultural identity (Dunstan et al. 2017). In turn, this can positively impact on students' wellbeing and facilitate student engagement, expectations for success, and achievement (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Craven and Magson 2014). For example, recent modelling of Tell Them From Me survey data found that one of the drivers of NSW Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander secondary school students' aspirations to finish high school was feeling good about their culture while at school (CESE 2021).

Positive self-identity, including cultural identity, can also promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' connection to their school (Ockenden 2014). Research suggests that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who feel a sense of belonging to school are more likely to have greater levels of emotional engagement and expectations of success (Dunstan et al. 2017).

Culturally safe schools also aim to make Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and communities feel welcome and connected to the school. Family and community engagement with schools has been shown to be beneficial for student engagement, aspirations and achievement (Commonwealth of Australia 2017; Ockenden 2014; Higgins and Morley 2014; also refer to Positive relationships theme).

### **Cultural competency is the foundation for a culturally safe school**

Strengthening cultural competency skills for the whole school is integral to building a culturally safe school (FECCA 2019; ACER 2015). The whole school community needs to be involved in valuing and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories and cultures into everyday school practices to ensure a safe environment in which Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students can excel (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Ockenden 2014).

Cultural competency of students can be developed by teaching all students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, knowledges and cultures, and by using other culturally responsive teaching practices (Morrison et al. 2019; also refer to Culturally responsive teaching theme). Research suggests that providing all students with opportunities to gain understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures can help create a more positive school environment, including by addressing racism and discrimination (Ockenden 2014).

Providing ongoing cultural competency professional learning to staff can improve confidence in building mutually respectful relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities, and delivering culturally responsive teaching (ACER 2015; Ockenden 2014). Building cultural competency can also support all staff to recognise that promoting educational outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students is a shared responsibility that requires whole-school collaboration (AITSL 2020). This is important because Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander education workers often report feeling isolated and unsupported in their roles (for review refer to Peacock and Prehn 2019). Improving the cultural competency of other staff may increase recognition of the expertise of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander education workers and facilitate more effective staff collaboration.

## Culturally safe schools create a place of connection

Culturally safe schools can act as hubs that create a place of connection for students, families, staff and community. Building stronger connections with families and community allows schools to develop a greater understanding of each student and their culture (AITSL 2020). Student engagement and connection to school are supported when students feel that their culture, including their family and community, is valued by the school (OECD 2017). Families and communities that feel known and valued are more likely to engage and participate in their children's education (AITSL 2020). This also benefits families by enabling them to feel more connected to the school and their child's education at school (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; AITSL 2020).

Culturally safe schools recognise the impact of intergenerational trauma, exclusionary education policies, deficit views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and incidents of racism on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences in school environments (Commonwealth of Australia 2017, Morrison et al. 2019). Schools can overcome these barriers by creating inclusive school environments where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and community members feel welcome and engage with the school on a regular basis. This may include creating spaces that can be used to meet with teachers and other families, share experiences and engage in cultural activities or programs (Higgins and Morley 2014; Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Ockenden 2014).

## Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges can promote student self-identity

Culturally safe schools support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to be proud of their cultural identity by embedding visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges (AITSL 2020; Jackson-Barrett and Lee-Hammond 2018). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students build positive self-identity by forming positive conceptions of themselves as students and as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples (Purdie et al. 2000; Ockenden 2014).

Research shows that in the school environment, positive self-identity for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students can be significantly influenced by peers, teachers, school leaders, school systems and the curriculum (Purdie et al. 2000; Ockenden 2014). Schools can encourage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to feel confident and develop their self-identity by positioning their cultural identity as a strength rather than a point of difference (Jackson-Barrett and Lee-Hammond 2018).

It is important for the school community to explicitly demonstrate to all students the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and knowledges (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Ockenden 2014). For example, the inclusion of content related to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and histories across the curriculum can demonstrate to students that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures have value within their school and the education system more broadly (Donovan 2015). Other strategies include providing opportunities for students to demonstrate pride and leadership, promoting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander role models, increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in educational leadership roles, and building culturally affirming relationships with family and community (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Ockenden 2014; OECD 2017).

## Key pathways



### Building culturally competent staff

Culturally competent staff have an awareness of their own cultural identity, critically reflect on their own perceptions of culture, and engage in building their understanding about the varying cultural norms of students and their families (Raymond 2020; AITSL 2020). Developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency involves school staff continually building their understanding of cultures, languages, knowledges, and current and historical experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (Raymond 2020).

Building cultural competency develops the capability of school staff to establish and maintain positive relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families, local communities and colleagues (Raymond 2020). Cultural competency also underpins teachers' ability and confidence to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives into the classroom and align them with NSW syllabus (Burgess 2019; ACER 2015; also refer to Culturally responsive teaching theme).

Continually building cultural competency requires both commitment from individual staff and collective commitment from the school community (AITSL 2020). School leaders can play a pivotal role in facilitating this collective commitment and ensuring teachers are supported to implement their cultural competency skills in their work. Teachers report that when building cultural competency is not a priority for school leaders, it may not be viewed as a shared responsibility by all teachers, which can negatively impact commitment from individual teachers (AITSL 2020). School leader investment may be particularly important for driving commitment from individual staff members in schools where few Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled (AITSL 2020).

To develop cultural competency of staff, schools should engage in regularly planned professional learning. This may include [courses run by the NSW Department of Education and the NSW AECG Inc.](#) Teachers and school leaders should also seek out opportunities for learning that are specific to the Aboriginal knowledges and cultures of the land on which the school is located and are delivered by local Aboriginal people (Burgess 2019, Jackson-Barrett and Lee-Hammond 2018). This may involve staff participating in regular local cultural immersion and/or on-Country learning to continually develop knowledge and understanding of local Aboriginal Country, histories, cultures, languages and perspectives. To ensure that this learning is implemented in school practices, school leaders can encourage staff to include cultural competency goals in their professional development plans (PDPs), and can include these goals in their own PDPs.

## Teaching all students about Aboriginal cultures

The department is committed to ensuring that every NSW student understands the heritage and culture of the Aboriginal peoples on whose lands they live, and that all students leave school with an understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage and cultures, and the history of the interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (NSW AECG Inc. and NSW Department of Education 2020). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are also identified as cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian curriculum (ACARA n.d.).

It is vital that local Aboriginal histories and cultures are included when schools implement syllabus content related to Aboriginal peoples and histories. This provides opportunities to examine similarities and differences between the cultures and experiences of the many diverse Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia (Board of Studies 2008). Before incorporating local Aboriginal perspectives, histories and knowledges into curriculum, schools should seek to understand protocols about obtaining relevant permissions and invite members of the Aboriginal community whose knowledge or history is being shared to be a part of the program writing (NESA 2021a; Board of Studies 2008; Morrison et al. 2019).<sup>3</sup>

The online resource [Storylines](#) provides schools with access and opportunity to share non-secret, non-sacred stories of Aboriginal histories, cultures and achievements. Schools can search for stories shared on their local community site or about specific topics. All stories contributed to Storylines are reviewed by the relevant community's consultation group before being shared on the site.

The [NESA Aboriginal Education Contexts](#) site contains examples of learning and teaching content collaboratively developed by teachers, Aboriginal education workers and local community members. The site also provides examples of processes used to develop teaching units. Schools can use these resources as a guide for the development of learning and teaching content that is tailored to their students and local context (NESA 2021a).

<sup>3</sup> [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and protocols](#) (NESA 2021b) provides information about working with NSW Aboriginal communities to include local cultures and histories in the classroom.

## Creating inclusive school environments

An inclusive school environment is physically and socially welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, staff, families and communities. Students and staff in an inclusive school environment feel like they belong at school and feel good about their culture when at school. For families and community members, an inclusive school environment can increase comfort when meeting with teachers and other families, sharing experiences and engaging in cultural activities or programs (Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Peacock and Prehn 2019).

Successful strategies for creating an inclusive environment will be different for different schools. Schools should work in partnership with students, families, the Local AECG and local community members to identify the best strategies for their school. As a starting point, schools should commit to making this work a priority across all aspects of the school, celebrate culturally important dates, include an Acknowledgement of and/or Welcome to Country (if possible and appropriate) at school events, and raise the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian flag. Schools should also adhere to the NSW Department of Education's [Anti-Racism Policy](#).

Following consultation with the local community, schools may consider using local Aboriginal language(s) in classroom displays and signage around the school (Miller and Steele 2021:116-117). In some schools, it may be appropriate to create specific Aboriginal spaces or rooms, staffed by Aboriginal staff. These spaces can be used for learning support activities (for example, homework clubs), Aboriginal cultural learning activities, and formal and informal meetings with students and/or families. They can be open to all students and create a physical space of connection that supports relationship building between staff and students, families, and community members (Donovan 2015).

Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in educational and leadership roles may also support the development of inclusive school environments. In international research, Indigenous students report that having more Indigenous teachers would make them feel more comfortable at school (OECD 2017:106). In Australia, research has found that schools with an Aboriginal education worker present all or some of the time are more likely to recognise days of significance, get involved with local communities, teach about culture and have Aboriginal language programs (Peacock and Prehn 2019). School leaders should seek to understand and address any barriers their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff face in attaining educational and leadership roles in their school. School leaders also need to ensure that creating an inclusive environment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students is a shared responsibility for all staff so that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff are not solely undertaking this work.

## Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a formal statement of commitment to reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program provides all Australian schools and early learning centres with a [framework to develop a RAP](#). The framework outlines a range of actions schools can undertake in the classroom, around the school and with the community under the 3 RAP pillars: relationships, respect and opportunities. Of these actions, 14 are required to ensure institutional integrity and a consistent minimum standard for RAPs. A RAP is a living document that requires ongoing critical reflection, consultation and collaboration.

A RAP offers a formalised way to understand and measure school progress on reconciliation. The actions under the relationships, respect and opportunities pillars aim to drive progress across the 5 interrelated dimensions of reconciliation: race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity and historical acceptance (Narragunnawali n.d.).

Schools can use the Narragunnawali online platform to develop and register a RAP, and find advice about implementing the key steps of developing a RAP and the actions in the framework. The platform also provides professional learning aligned to actions in the framework and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, and curriculum resources that align with the Australian curriculum.

## Resources

- NSW Department of Education [Anti-Racism Policy](#)
- [Storylines](#)
- [NESA Aboriginal Education Contexts site](#)
- Reconciliation Australia's [Narragunnawali program](#)
- NSW Department of Education [Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country](#) information
- The NSW Department of Education provides a range of professional learning opportunities on the MyPL platform, including the ['Turning Policy into Action' course](#) that supports schools to implement the Aboriginal Education Policy in their schools.
- The NSW AECG Inc. offers [professional learning courses](#) aligned to stages in the syllabus and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. These courses include Aboriginal perspectives and provide an understanding of the relationship that exists between Aboriginal peoples and their environments.

# Culturally responsive teaching



## | Key points

- Culturally responsive teaching recognises that students' cultural backgrounds influence their ways of knowing, thinking and communicating.
- Research suggests that culturally responsive teaching can improve enablers of student success and achievement, including student engagement, wellbeing, and cultural and self-identity.
- There is no single approach to culturally responsive teaching for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. However, schools may enact it by implementing an Aboriginal language program, recognising and meeting needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who speak English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), embedding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander pedagogies, and/or sharing and harnessing staff expertise.



## Defining culturally responsive teaching

Culturally responsive teaching recognises that students' cultural backgrounds influence their ways of knowing, thinking and communicating (Sarra and Ewing 2021:151). By understanding and responding to these cultural influences, teachers can promote student learning (Sarra and Ewing 2021:151). There are varying definitions of culturally responsive teaching in the literature, and the term is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as 'culturally competent', 'culturally relevant' and 'culturally sensitive' teaching or pedagogy (Morrison et al. 2019; ACER 2015). A commonly cited definition is from US education researcher Geneva Gay:

- ‘Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.’  
(Gay 2002:106).

As such, culturally responsive teaching can be understood to require, but also extend beyond, a teacher's cultural competence. It requires teachers to use their cultural competence to validate and harness students' ways of knowing, thinking and communicating to promote learning. It also requires teachers to seek out opportunities to learn and engage with culture.

There is no single approach to culturally responsive teaching for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. This reflects the great diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultural practices, and the varied (often multicultural) backgrounds of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in any given school (ACER 2015; Morrison et al. 2019). As such, it is important for teachers to understand the general principles of culturally responsive teaching and then implement approaches that meet the needs of the individual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in their classroom or school.

## What the evidence says

### Culturally responsive teaching can enable student success and achievement

Research suggests that culturally responsive teaching can improve enablers of student success and achievement, including student engagement, wellbeing, and cultural and self-identity (ACER 2015:14). There is more limited research exploring direct links between culturally responsive teaching and student achievement (Morrison et al. 2019). However, a small number of international studies have found promising results (Burgess et al. 2019). For example, in New Zealand the Te Kotahitanga program supported teachers to use a culturally responsive teaching approach for Māori students. In schools that participated in the program, Māori students' academic achievement improved at a rate greater than in schools that did not participate (Alton-Lee 2015, as cited in Morrison et al. 2019).

### Critical reflection is central to culturally responsive teaching

Culturally responsive teaching encourages teachers to critically reflect on their own privilege and assumptions and adjust their beliefs and attitudes about learning, classroom communication and what knowledge is considered legitimate (Morrison et al. 2019). Critical reflection about these beliefs and attitudes, especially those outside immediate awareness, is important to ensure teachers facilitate an equitable learning environment for all students (Burgess 2019). For example, teachers may believe they have high expectations for all students, but their expectations for students can still vary by students' cultural backgrounds (Papageorge and Gershenson 2016, as cited in Sarra et al. 2018). Research suggests that culturally responsive teaching approaches that change non-Aboriginal teachers' attitudes, particularly about expectations and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' experiences, can positively affect enablers of student success and achievement (Burgess et al. 2019).

### Understanding students' language and dialect backgrounds enhances communication and learning

Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to value their students' language and dialect backgrounds and understand how their backgrounds influence their communication and access to learning in the classroom. This is an important consideration for teachers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students because some students have first or 'home' languages that are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander languages, creole languages, and Aboriginal English (Queensland Government 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Differences between these languages and Standard Australian English (SAE) can be subtle (Queensland Government 2013). As such, teachers and students may assume they have a shared understanding of word meanings and other verbal and non-verbal language features (Oliver and Forrest 2021:100). These assumptions can contribute to miscommunication, EAL/D needs not being met, and assessments and teacher judgements that do not accurately reflect a student's level of understanding and proficiency (Oliver and Forrest 2021:100; Queensland Government 2013). When teachers understand how a student's home language differs from SAE they are better able to reduce these risks and make language and dialect differences explicit (Oliver and Forrest 2021:100; Queensland Government 2013). Explicitly teaching these differences can help to validate students' EAL/D needs and minimise miscommunication, and may also promote SAE proficiency (Oliver and Forrest 2021:109).

<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal English refers to dialects of English that are spoken by Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Dialects have their own concepts, functions, uses and forms, and can vary by region (refer to Oliver and Forrest 2021).

## Culturally responsive teaching respectfully embeds Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives

Culturally responsive teaching approaches offer opportunities for different ways of knowing and different cultural perspectives to be embedded in curriculum and pedagogy. Approaches to embedding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives vary, and may involve implementing an Aboriginal language program, Aboriginal pedagogies, and/or learning on Country (Morrison et al. 2019; Burgess et al. 2019; Harrison et al. 2019).

Regardless of the approach used, it is important that schools minimise the risk of perpetuating stereotypes and maintain respectful learning relationships with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities whose knowledge is being shared (Morrison et al. 2019). Schools should seek to understand appropriate protocols, materials and resources for their students, obtain appropriate permissions from members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities whose knowledge is being shared, and avoid tokenistic approaches (Morrison et al. 2019).<sup>5</sup> Schools should not claim ownership of any cultural knowledge or practices that community members give permission to use in the school.

## Teachers need to be empowered to use culturally responsive teaching approaches

Teachers do not always feel confident in their ability to use culturally responsive teaching approaches. In Australia, teachers often report that they do not have a strong understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, histories and cultural practices (Morrison et al. 2019). This low sense of cultural competency can undermine confidence in using culturally responsive teaching approaches for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Morrison et al. 2019; Burgess 2019).

Professional learning that supports critical reflection, understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives, and authentic and genuine engagement with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community members can be an important first step in helping teachers to use culturally responsive approaches (Burgess 2019). Research also suggests that school leaders play a critical role in developing teachers' culturally responsive teaching. They may do this by modelling and finding new approaches, adjusting and adapting curriculum and assessment, and providing professional learning opportunities (Khalifa, Gooden and Davis 2016, as cited in Morrison et al. 2019).

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<sup>5</sup> [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and protocols](#) (NESA 2021b) provides information about working with NSW Aboriginal communities to include local cultures and histories in the classroom.

## Key pathways



### Implementing an Aboriginal language program

Aboriginal languages can be used as part of everyday instruction or taught as separate language lessons through a language program (Morrison et al. 2019). Any teaching of Aboriginal languages needs to be done by Aboriginal language teachers from that language background and approved by the local Aboriginal community. In some rare circumstances, non-Aboriginal teachers may receive permission from the local community to teach an Aboriginal language, but this is an exception to the norm.

Providing opportunities for students to learn an Aboriginal language may contribute to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' sense of cultural identity and cultural competency. For non-Aboriginal students, learning an Aboriginal language can teach them about the importance and richness of Aboriginal cultures. An Aboriginal language program can also provide opportunities to explicitly teach students about language features, which may promote proficiency in SAE by building student phonological, lexical, syntactical and pragmatics awareness (Oliver and Forrest 2021:109). However, more research is needed to better understand the influence of learning an Aboriginal language on SAE proficiency (Lowe et al. 2020).

As part of the OCHRE agreement, the NSW Department of Education established 5 Language and Culture Nests. Each Nest is a network of communities bound together by connection to an Aboriginal language (Savage 2020).<sup>6</sup> The 5 Nests are Bundjalung, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay, Gumbaynggirr, North West Wiradjuri and Paakantji. More recently, 2 satellite Nests have been established: Dughutti and Gomerioi (Savage 2020). Each Nest has a 'footprint' area that spans the relevant Aboriginal language area. Under the Nest structure, schools within the footprint may access educators who teach the relevant Aboriginal language.

The [Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests Guidelines](#) provide guidance for schools considering implementing an Aboriginal language program within a Nest footprint area. Schools not within a Nest footprint should work with their local Aboriginal community if they are considering implementing an Aboriginal language program, and can use the Nest guidelines as a model. The department's Languages, Culture and Communities team within the Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnership Directorate can provide support to a school considering an Aboriginal language program, as teaching Aboriginal languages is a complex and sensitive area.

<sup>6</sup> OCHRE is the NSW Government plan for Aboriginal affairs, developed for and in consultation with Aboriginal communities. OCHRE stands for opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility and empowerment.

## Recognising and meeting needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D students

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who have first or home languages that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, creole languages such as Torres Strait Creole and Kriol, and Aboriginal English do not always have their EAL/D needs recognised and met. Differences between a student's proficiency in their home language and Standard Australian English (SAE) may not be immediately apparent. As academic language demands increase in the curriculum, however, SAE language skills become more critical for a student to both understand and demonstrate their understanding of key learning areas (ACARA 2014). Therefore, to ensure students can access instruction and demonstrate success in the classroom, teachers need to be able to recognise and meet the needs of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who are EAL/D learners.

To effectively teach Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D students, teachers require an understanding of the characteristics of EAL/D learning (ACARA 2014). The Capability Framework: Teaching Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners (the framework) is a cross-jurisdictional initiative between the NSW Department of Education, Northern Territory Government, the Western Australia Department of Education and the Queensland Government. The framework identifies 7 capabilities relating to the professional knowledge, practice and engagement that teachers require to meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D students. Each capability is related to an Australian Professional Standards for Teachers standard and can be used independently or in conjunction with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Queensland Government 2013). Teachers and school leaders can use the framework to:

- inform practice, self-assess their capabilities and inform professional learning goals
- determine staff professional learning needs for teaching Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners
- support teachers in the accreditation process through the PDP process (NSW Department of Education 2020b).

## Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies refer to teaching practices and methods that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies can be used successfully for all students, not just Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Pedagogical approaches can include 'two-way' or 'both-ways' learning 'where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and Western knowledges find a space in which each is appreciated and respected, and by doing so meaningful exchanges can occur' (Armour and Miller 2021:164).

Embedding an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander pedagogy requires teachers to not only critically reflect on their cultural assumptions and beliefs, but also to seek permission to access and share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in their classrooms (Armour and Miller 2021:165). As such, these approaches encourage strong and respectful relationships with members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community whose knowledge is being shared. Co-construction approaches also allow teachers to gain greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and knowledges, and allow cultures and community members to gain a greater understanding of curriculum (Lewthwaite et al. 2015 as cited in Armour and Miller 2021:163).

The '8 Ways' pedagogy is an example of an Aboriginal pedagogy developed in Baakindji, Ngiyampaa, Yuwaalaraay, Gamilaraay, Wiradjuri, Wangkumarra and other nations in Western NSW (8 ways n.d). The 8 Ways pedagogy has informed the development of the Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework promoted by the department. The Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework allows core curriculum content to remain the focus while also embedding Aboriginal perspectives in every lesson (8 ways n.d.). Schools can use the Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework as a starting point to work in partnership with their local community to develop a pedagogy that reflects local ways of learning (8 ways n.d).

## Sharing and harnessing staff expertise

Culturally responsive teaching approaches will be more successfully implemented if there are opportunities for staff to share and harness expertise within schools (Morrison et al. 2019) and between schools (OECD 2017:122). Research suggests that dedicated time for professional conversations about culturally responsive teaching approaches are highly valued by staff, and teachers also report these conversations lead to improvements in their teaching practices for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (University of Technology Sydney 2009). As such, these types of professional conversations provide a way to increase teacher confidence and ensure ongoing professional development about culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Research also suggests that Aboriginal education officers often report having their expertise undervalued and/or being given sole responsibility for meeting the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (for review refer to Peacock and Prehn 2019). Dedicated time for all staff to engage in collaborative work focused on culturally responsive teaching may help to address these concerns by ensuring Aboriginal education officers have their expertise and contributions recognised. Dedicated time also provides opportunities to clarify roles and responsibilities across the school.

Opportunities for sharing and harnessing staff expertise can also support the development of a shared and common understanding of a school's culturally responsive teaching approaches. This may include instructional leadership activities that model culturally responsive teaching and assessment practices (Khalifa, Gooden and Davis 2016, as cited in Morrison et al. 2019). Modelling and mentoring by teachers who are skilled at culturally responsive teaching are other ways to share staff expertise. Staff having a shared and common understanding is a noted enabler of successfully implemented culturally responsive approaches (CESE 2018; Sarra et al. 2018).

School leaders can play an integral role in the success of staff sharing and harnessing expertise in culturally responsive teaching. Since they are decision-makers, school leaders can influence how collaboration is implemented in their school and what systems and mechanisms are in place to support it. However, further research is required to understand how school leaders can best facilitate staff collaboration about culturally responsive teaching.

## Resources

- [Capability Framework: Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners](#)
- [NESA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and protocols](#)
- [8 ways of learning](#)
- [Deadly Dialects](#)
- [EAL/D Hub](#)
- [Statewide staffrooms](#)
- [Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests Guidelines](#)

# Positive relationships



## | Key points

- Positive relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families, communities and school are critical for students' achievement, success and engagement at school.
- Positive relationships are crucial for the ongoing engagement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities in school, which in turn facilitates a shared understanding about education and builds a strong learning community.
- Schools may enact positive relationships by knowing students and valuing their cultures, being visible inside and outside of school, supporting Aboriginal education officers and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff while consulting with the Local AECC.



## Defining positive relationships

Key relationships that can have an impact on student learning include those between school staff at all levels, students, families and communities (Miller and Steele 2021). When these key relationships are perceived as positive, they are sometimes also described as authentic, genuine, strong and/or successful (Donovan 2015; Exell and Gower 2021; Lowe et al. 2019).

There is no common understanding of what a positive relationship looks like in the school context. However, the literature does identify some core characteristics of positive relationships between school staff and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, their families and their communities. These core characteristics indicate that positive relationships are:

- facilitated by school staff
- built on shared trust, respect and understanding
- developed and maintained over time
- reciprocal in nature and fostered through engagement by school staff that demonstrates genuine interest in students and their families and communities (Bishop and Durksen 2020; Donovan 2015; Exell and Gower 2021; Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019; Lowe 2017).

## What the evidence says

### Positive relationships can enable student success and achievement

Evidence suggests that positive relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families, communities and school are critical for students' achievement, success and engagement at school (Exell and Gower 2021; Higgins and Morley 2014; Guenther et al. 2019; Ockenden 2014). For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, the teacher-student relationship is particularly important in influencing self-identity as a learner and engagement in education (Munns et al. 2013; Exell and Gower 2021). For example, the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children found that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' emotional engagement at school increases when they have positive relationships with their teachers (Dunstan et al. 2017).

Research shows that authentic relationships between schools, families and communities can positively influence students' aspirations, achievement and enjoyment of school (Llewellyn et al. 2018; What Works. The Works Program 2012). In addition, when families have positive relationships with school they are more likely to be active partners in their children's learning, which has benefits for students' development, achievement and engagement (OECD 2017:124). Similarly, positive relationships with communities can enable a sense of community ownership of education processes and enrich the quality of the education Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students receive, which in turn promotes their educational outcomes (Griffiths 2011; Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research 2019).

### The teacher-student relationship is a critical relationship for students at school

A positive teacher-student relationship can demonstrate to students and their families that their teachers are invested in their educational success. For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students the teacher-student relationship may be one of the most influential relationships a student has with an adult outside of their family, who may also be outside of their community and culture (Exell and Gower 2021).

Research indicates that positive relationships with students can be built through teacher interactions that are characterised by personal warmth, good humour, support, high expectations and a genuine interest in students' lives both inside and outside of the classroom (Bishop and Durksen 2020; Exell and Gower 2021; Llewellyn et al. 2018; Ockenden 2014). Teachers can also build and sustain positive relationships with students by developing their cultural competency so that students feel that their cultural backgrounds are known and valued (Miller and Steele 2021). Furthermore, positive teacher-student relationships can assist teachers to understand their students' ways of knowing, thinking and communicating (Miller and Steele 2021), which can support teachers' use of culturally responsive teaching practices and personalised learning within culturally safe classrooms (Refer to Culturally responsive teaching and Personalised learning themes).

### **Positive relationships drive engagement between families, communities and school**

Positive relationships are crucial for the ongoing engagement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities in school. These relationships can help overcome barriers to engagement that may arise from the influence of historic and systemic exclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples from school, intergenerational trauma, experiences of racism, deficit views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and the ongoing effects of colonisation (ACER 2015; ARACY 2016; Miller and Steele 2021; Morrison et al. 2019).

To support engagement and positive relationships with families and communities, it is vital that the school builds trust and respect by demonstrating cultural safety, and being inclusive and welcoming for families and communities (Exell and Gower 2021; Higgins and Morley 2014). In addition, the ongoing engagement and positive relationships with families and communities can be strengthened by supporting broader community initiatives, providing opportunities to invite families and communities into the school, employing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in the school, and following community consultation protocols (Board of Studies 2008; Exell and Gower 2021; Lowe et al. 2019; Peacock and Prehn 2019).

### **A strong learning community is built through positive relationships with families and communities**

Positive relationships between families, communities and schools can facilitate a shared understanding about education, which underpins a strong learning community (DESE 2018; What Works. The Works Program 2012). Involvement in the education of students can also help families and communities to develop a sense of belonging to the school (ARACY 2020).

Through genuine relationships with families, teachers can promote a strong learning community. Teachers should ask families questions about what they need to know to empower their children as learners in the classroom, and what the shared educational goals for children are and how they can be achieved collaboratively (Miller and Steele 2021).

Schools can ensure a strong learning community is built by developing authentic relationships with communities and involving community organisations such as the Local or Regional AECG in decision-making at school, including school policy directions, priorities and curriculum decisions (Lowe et al. 2019; Ockenden 2014). Genuine involvement in these types of decisions ensures the community has input into the education of students and that the education is culturally responsive, and builds the capabilities, resources and cultural understanding of communities and school staff (Griffiths 2011; Lowe 2017; Lowe et al. 2019).

## Key pathways



### Knowing students and valuing their cultures

Knowing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and their cultures means establishing and maintaining an understanding of each student and their broader out-of-school context (Munns et al. 2013). Developing this understanding is a continual process which involves building trust and respect with each student by showing genuine interest in their lives inside and outside the classroom (Exell and Gower 2021). When Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students feel as though their teachers know them and their culture, there are benefits for classroom relationships and student learning outcomes (Munns et al. 2013). This may be because students are more likely to challenge themselves and be engaged and more receptive to learning content when their teacher shows interest in them (Exell and Gower 2021; Sarra et al. 2018).

In the classroom, teachers can build their understanding of each student by providing opportunities for students to share their interests and out-of-school activities (Exell and Gower 2021; Munns et al. 2013; NSW Department of Education 2021). Teachers can also monitor if students feel represented in curriculum resources and content and make responsive adjustments. Making time to get to know students outside of the classroom may provide further opportunities to understand students' skills, interests and strengths (Exell and Gower 2021:93). This could take place in the playground, by coaching sporting teams, through co-curricular activities, and through the personalised learning pathway process (refer to Personalised learning theme).

It is also important for school leaders to know students and value their cultures, and to support teachers to develop an understanding of each student. School leaders should be mindful to prioritise opportunities for positive engagement with students while at school. Tell Them From Me results can assist school leaders to understand if Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in their school feel known, valued and cared for, and if they report that their teachers have a good understanding of their culture.

For information about how to support staff capabilities in understanding and implementing their knowledge of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, refer to the following key pathways in this paper:

- 'Building culturally competent staff' in the Culturally safe schools theme
- 'Sharing and harnessing staff expertise' in the Culturally responsive teaching theme
- 'Using personalised learning pathways' in the Personalised learning theme.

Staff can also consult with the department's regional Aboriginal Education and Wellbeing teams and the Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships Directorate for further information and support.

## Being visible inside and outside of school

Being visible inside and outside of school involves teachers and school leaders finding opportunities to positively interact with students, families and communities beyond the classroom. Creating opportunities for these interactions demonstrates staff are approachable and open to developing mutual and respectful relationships (Exell and Gower 2021).

Staff making time to be visible inside and outside of school can help make school a safe and welcoming place for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities (Exell and Gower 2021). One example of how school leaders and teachers can do this is by being visible at the school gate and proactively engaging with students, families and the community. This can facilitate family and community engagement with the school (ARACY 2016). There are also opportunities for informal communication when school staff are approachable inside and outside of school (Exell and Gower 2021). These informal conversations provide additional opportunities to talk with families about students and their learning, and help with relationship development.

Schools can provide opportunities for teachers and school leaders to be visible in school by inviting families and communities in and making school a welcoming place. This could be through hosting community events at school, and inviting families and members of the community to be involved with learning activities in the classroom and on excursions (ARACY 2016; Miller and Steele 2021).

Schools can also increase visibility of staff by reaching out to families and communities. Schools can do this by proactively contacting families to share positive aspects of a student's learning, attending local community events where appropriate, attending Local AECG meetings and having school participation in the broader community (ARACY 2016; Miller and Steele 2021). For further information about strategies, refer to the [Family-School Partnerships Framework](#).

## Supporting Aboriginal education officers

Aboriginal education officers (AEOs) play a vital role in schools for staff, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities. It is important that teachers and school leaders have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of an AEO so that they are supported to carry out their role effectively (CESE 2018; Peacock and Prehn 2019).

As well as providing guidance and advice on Aboriginal education in schools, AEOs are a critical link between families, communities and school (Guenther et al. 2019; NSW Department of Education 2020c). When fully supported in their role, AEOs can be a source of connection and communication with families and schools. They are a key source of knowledge for teachers and school leaders on students and their backgrounds, local cultures, curriculum development and teaching activities, and cultural support and advice (CESE 2018; Exell and Gower 2021; Miller and Steele 2021). AEOs can work with teachers to assist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to achieve their potential, and keep the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities informed of students' progress and achievements, as well as meetings, activities and programs in school (NSW Department of Education 2020c).

School leaders can ensure that AEOs are supported in their schools by building the capacity and developing leadership of Aboriginal staff. For example, they can provide mentoring and coaching, and facilitate and support the involvement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in collegial and leadership development networks. School leaders can also support AEOs by building the capacity of other school staff in Aboriginal education, building connections with community, and establishing governance and processes for decision-making (such as Aboriginal education teams) so the responsibility is shared across school staff. Teachers and school leaders should also collaborate with AEOs to outline with them what will be taught in the classroom, and involve AEOs in staff meetings related to the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the school (Board of Studies 2008).

## Consulting with your Local AECG

Consultation between schools and local Aboriginal communities, services and organisations is central to building positive relationships. Consultation allows for the development of a shared understanding about education that captures a wide range of community perspectives, knowledge and priorities. Schools should engage with their Local AECG as part of this consultation process (NSW Department of Education 2020b). The NSW AECG Inc. is recognised by the department as the peak community advisory body for Aboriginal education in NSW (NSW AECG Inc. and NSW Education 2020). The NSW AECG Inc. has 20 regional networks across the state, which are comprised of Local AECG networks. A school's Local AECG can provide advice and guidance for teachers and school leaders about the curriculum, teaching activities and educational issues (Board of Studies 2008).

Schools can find contact details for their Local AECG using the [NSW AECG Inc. region finder](#). If there is no Local AECG group, schools should contact their Regional AECG or the NSW AECG Inc. Teachers and school leaders can consult with their Local AECG about attending local meetings where important educational issues impacting on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are discussed (Board of Studies 2008). Teachers and school leaders can also consult with their Local AECG to ensure local protocols are followed when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities (Board of Studies 2008). When working with a Local AECG, schools should adhere to the principles outlined in the partnership agreement with the NSW AECG Inc. (NSW AECG Inc. and NSW Education 2020).

## Resources

- Board of Studies [Working with Aboriginal Communities](#)
- [NSW AECG Inc. regions](#)
- Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment [Family-School Partnerships Framework](#)
- NSW Department of Education [Building capacity and developing leadership of Aboriginal staff](#)

# Personalised learning



## Key points

- Personalised learning approaches aim to increase engagement and achievement by tailoring learning based on individual student strengths, needs, interests, progress and/or goals.
- Personalised learning with a strengths-based approach provides students with learning environments that support them to achieve to a high standard.
- Schools may enact personalised learning for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students by using personalised learning pathways, recognising and supporting high potential and gifted students, planning for strong transitions, and ensuring opportunities for student voice.

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## Defining personalised learning

Personalised learning approaches aim to increase engagement and achievement by tailoring teaching and learning based on individual student strengths, needs, interests, culture, progress and/or goals. These approaches require teachers to believe that all students can achieve to a high standard if they are provided with the right conditions and support for success. There is no clear, agreed upon definition of personalised learning, and similar terms such as 'personalised instruction', 'individualised learning' and 'individualised instruction' are also used in the literature. The US Department of Education provides a frequently cited, useful working definition:

‘Personalized learning refers to instruction in which the pace of learning and the instructional approach are optimized for the needs of each learner. Learning objectives, instructional approaches, and instructional content (and its sequencing) may all vary based on learner needs. In addition, learning activities are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated.’

**(US Department of Education 2017:9)**

The lack of a clear definition partly reflects that different personalised learning approaches are driven by a variety of underpinning learning theories. These theories include, but are not limited to, mastery learning, differentiation, self-determination theory, interest theory, funds of knowledge and situated cognition (Walkington and Bernacki 2020:241). Depending on the underlying theory, personalised learning approaches vary by how pace of learning is optimised, how deeply student interests are incorporated, the degree of student control and choice, and if instruction is given to individual students or groups of students who share some characteristics (for example, strengths, needs or interests) (Walkington and Bernacki 2020). For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, it is important that any personalised learning approach is also culturally responsive and developed collaboratively with the student, their family and their community.



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## What the evidence says

### Personalised learning can enable student success and achievement

There is limited research exploring the effectiveness of personalised learning approaches for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, although more generally there is moderate evidence that personalised learning can promote student achievement (Evidence for Learning n.d.). The literature notes that 'one size fits all' approaches are not effective for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Helme and Lambe 2011:1 as cited in Productivity Commission 2016). In addition, personalised learning approaches have been used in schools and systems that have improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Jumbunna Institute 2019; Button et al. 2016; OECD 2017:60-61).

There is also evidence to suggest that individually paced learning and opportunities for student voices are effective engagement strategies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Burgess et al. 2019). As such, these 2 components of personalised approaches may be key considerations for teachers trying to promote engagement for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

The literature also emphasises the importance of strengths-based approaches for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Strengths-based approaches acknowledge the existing capabilities and resources of individuals and their communities, assume all students can learn and grow, and require schools to work in collaboration with students and their families (Shay et al. 2021:70; Sarra et al. 2018; ACER 2012:9).

### A holistic understanding of each student underpins effective personalised learning

An understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' strengths, needs, culture, and goals, including their cultural knowledge and cultural obligations, is fundamental to personalised learning. This understanding should be based on holistic, student-centred data (What Works. The Work Program 2011b). Using multiple sources of data can help teachers gain a more accurate picture of a student's learning and next steps (What Works. The Work Program 2011b). This data might include a variety of different assessment tasks, observations, and conversations with a student and their family about the student's learning (Productivity Commission 2016). When using assessment data, teachers should consider the cultural validity of the assessment design and implementation, including accounting for the impact of students' language backgrounds (Trumbull and Nelson-Barber 2019). Whole-school approaches (for example, personalised learning pathways and case management teams) can support teachers to systematically collect and effectively use data for personalised learning (What Works. The Work Program 2011a; Button et al. 2016; Ockenden 2014).

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## Personalised learning can facilitate a culture of high expectations

Personalised learning approaches provide opportunities for students, families and teachers to collaboratively build a shared culture of high expectations (Miller and Steele 2021, Sarra et al. 2018). A culture of high expectations in schools has been identified as a key element for promoting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' educational outcomes (Productivity Commission 2016; Button et al. 2016). However, analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children data found that while parent expectations remained high, teacher expectations of students declined as students progressed through school (Peacock et al. 2020).

Personalised learning approaches that require teachers to consider a student's strengths, aspirations and progress towards learning goals may facilitate teachers to critically reflect on the expectations they hold and develop responsive strategies to enable students to meet high expectations (Sarra et al. 2018; Miller and Steele 2021). This requires teachers to have high expectations of themselves and the school's ability to promote outcomes for their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Sarra et al. 2018; OECD 2017).

## Strengths-based approaches support all students to learn to a high standard

Personalised learning with a strengths-based approach provides students with the learning environments they need to achieve to a high standard. Teachers, students and families should work together to create a school culture that combines high expectations with high support, and fosters students' sense of belonging in school. These conditions can facilitate students' positive self-identity as learners (Sarra et al. 2018). Research suggests that there is an interconnected relationship between having a positive self-identity as a learner and academic achievement (Purdie et al. 2000, for review refer to Prehn et al. 2020).

Strengths-based approaches also help teachers identify when a student needs additional or intensive support to progress learning or reach a goal (What Works. The Work Program 2011a). There is evidence to suggest this support is more effective when it is provided in addition to, rather than instead of, regular classroom instruction (OECD 2017). Strengths-based approaches can also help teachers to recognise and provide appropriately challenging learning opportunities for gifted and talented Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Garvis et al. 2019). Building these teacher capabilities may help address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in gifted and talented programs, and the barriers students often face in accessing these programs in regional and remote schools (Garvis et al. 2019; Townend et al. 2020).

## Key pathways



### Ensuring opportunities for student voice

Student voice is characterised by students actively participating in decision-making at school and schools acting on the perspectives and opinions of students in a way that genuinely shapes students' educational experiences (NSW Department of Education 2020e).

Incorporating student voice is a critical part of personalised learning because it can increase engagement, contribute to positive learning relationships, build a sense of belonging at school and help develop students' personal and social capabilities (NSW Department of Education 2020e). These factors are all known to contribute to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' success and achievement. As such, ensuring opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student voice is especially important.

The NSW Department of Education [Student voice, participation and leadership model](#) identifies 4 factors of student voice that have the most impact for all students:

- having voice – being listened to and heard in different areas of school life
- having choice – making personal choices and choosing to get involved
- having influence – students' views contribute to actions or decisions at school
- working together – teachers and students taking shared action in all areas of school life.

Schools should seek out and facilitate culturally safe opportunities for student voice. In addition to ensuring culturally safe student voice opportunities in the classroom and at school, teachers and school leaders should also provide leadership platforms and support students to use their voice in the wider community. This might include working with students to build their skills in facilitating peer-to-peer discussions and mentoring (Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018). Developing these skills can support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to feel confident as role models and leaders within and beyond the school.

Schools can also create opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to engage with Elders and other community leaders – for example, by inviting community members into the school to work with students. Strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and Elders and other community leaders can help students identify different role models and mentors, and can encourage students to engage with their community in a variety of ways.

## Using personalised learning pathways

Personalised learning pathways (PLPs) record a student's academic and cultural goals and aspirations and the learning pathways required to pursue these, in a context that considers the student's spiritual, emotional, social and physical health and wellbeing (NSW Department of Education n.d.; What Works. The Works Program 2011a). Developing a PLP is an active process that occurs in partnership with the student's family and is informed by an initial analysis of holistic student-centred data, discussions between students, families and teachers, and ongoing monitoring and review (NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW AECG Inc 2004). This process can also involve support from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and other specialist school staff and agencies (NSW Department of Education n.d). PLPs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are distinct from, but may inform, the personalised learning and support process used to assess and develop learning plans for students with additional needs.

An effective PLP process actively engages Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and families in decision-making about student learning and builds shared understandings of academic and cultural goals, aspirations, expectations and responsibilities (NSW Department of Education n.d; What Works. The Works Program 2011a). PLPs can also assist continuity of learning when used as part of handover processes between school years, between schools or at other key transition points. Gifted and talented students can also be supported to fulfil their potential when PLPs are designed to identify exceptional learners and document the appropriate strategies and differentiated curricula needed to support them (NSW Department of Education n.d.). PLPs can assist teachers and families to monitor student progress, and document and celebrate student successes.

The department recommends PLPs for all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW. Each school is encouraged to customise the process to meet their local needs and contexts. The NSW Department of Education [Personalised Learning Pathways \(PLPs\) for Aboriginal Students Guidelines \(PDF 262KB\)](#) provides guidance on key characteristics of effective PLPs. These include:

- using specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) goals
- facilitating student ownership of the PLP
- ensuring the PLP is readily available for students, families and school staff to view at any time
- ensuring there is a literacy and numeracy component for all students who are at risk of falling behind.

## Recognising and supporting high potential and gifted students

Understandings of high potential and giftedness can vary between and within cultures (for review refer to CESE 2019). Schools should work within their local contexts to build a shared understanding of what high potential and giftedness looks like in their school community (Garvis et al. 2019). This understanding can be used to ensure high potential and gifted students are given learning opportunities that challenge and extend them.

Providing high potential and gifted students with challenging learning opportunities is important because Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are underrepresented in gifted education programs (Gibson and Vialle 2007). This may reflect teachers lacking the cultural competency to recognise high potential and gifted students from minority cultures (Thraves 2018, as cited in Garvis et al. 2019). Building cultural competency can support teachers to reflect on their own conceptualisations of high potential and giftedness and work in partnership with the school community to develop appropriate learning opportunities (Bevan-Brown 2011).

Underrepresentation may also be due to a reluctance among some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to draw attention to their achievements because of a cultural aversion to self-promotion (Gibson and Vialle 2007). Teachers can address this by setting the tone in their classrooms so that everyone's achievements are recognised.

An identified feature of successful gifted programs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students is working with local communities to understand their cultural perspectives of high potential and giftedness (Thraves and Bannister-Tyrell 2017). Engaging with communities in this way can help identify students who previously may not have been identified by the school, and can support programming and planning (Garvis et al. 2019). This may include working in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and the Local AECG to develop ways to support students with high cultural knowledge and/or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language knowledge. Recognising and encouraging students' potential in cultural knowledge and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language knowledge has the added benefit of providing a 'path in' for teachers to build their students' potential in other areas as well.

There are no NSW or Australian Government education programs developed specifically for high potential and gifted Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers and school leaders can seek out relevant programs run by universities and other non-government organisations and discuss with students and families the types of opportunities that are available. Schools should encourage and support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to access opportunity classes and academically selective high schools where possible, including Aurora College for students in regional and remote areas. However, every school should also be prepared to meet the needs of high potential and gifted Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students within their own school.

## Planning for strong transitions

Common transitions that students experience include the transitions into primary school, high school and post-school pathways, from one year level to another, and geographical relocation. During transitions students may have to adjust to different rules and expectations, new peers and school staff, and the challenges and demands of a new learning environment (What Works. The Work Program 2013; NSW Department of Education 2020d).

A strong transition occurs when an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student is socially, emotionally and cognitively prepared for the next stage of their educational pathway (What Works. The Work Program 2013:5). Schools play a critical role in facilitating strong transitions for students (for review refer to What Works. The Work Program 2013). Schools should assist students to be ready for each transition as prior transitioning experiences can influence how students adjust to new environments, future educational outcomes and their post-school experiences (NSW Department of Education 2020d).

Each type of transition has unique elements, but there are some common elements of effective school planning for strong transitions. Timely transition planning with a personalised approach can assist schools to systematically identify student strengths, needs, interests, progress and goals. Transition planning also allows schools to ensure they are ready for the student and family by providing responsive support for students' strengths and needs, ensuring a culturally safe school, and using culturally responsive teaching practices. The use of transition planning has the potential to enhance family and community readiness to work with the school to support students. Enhancing family and community readiness requires schools to work in partnership with students, families, regional Aboriginal education teams and communities, and – where relevant – also key agencies, businesses, and community. Aboriginal education officers and Aboriginal staff can help support this process.

Further guidance about supporting strong transitions can be found in the NSW Department of Education's [Transition to school guidelines](#), and ['Every student is known, valued and cared for' platform advice about transitions](#).

## Resources

- NSW Department of Education [Personalised Learning Pathways \(PLPs\) for Aboriginal Students Guidelines \(PDF 262KB\)](#)
- NSW Department of Education [Student voice, participation and leadership model](#)
- NSW Department of Education ['Every student is known, valued and cared for' platform advice about transitions](#)
- NSW Department of Education [Transition to school guidelines](#)

# Appendix A:

## Links between the NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy statement and themes

The Aboriginal Education Policy is the principal document that defines the department's commitments to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal education in its schools. The policy was developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and key partners. The policy should underpin and inform planning, teaching practice and approaches to educational leadership, in partnership with the NSW AECG Inc. and local Aboriginal communities. Each policy point has been mapped to the themes in this paper that most closely align to it, to assist schools to engage with the policy.

**Table 1**  
Links to NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy

Policy dot point	Policy outcome	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Commitments</b>				
1.1.1	The NSW Department of Education is committed to improving the educational outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students so that they excel and achieve in every aspect of their education.	–	Yes	–	Yes
1.1.2	It is the goal of the department that, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population.	–	Yes	–	Yes
1.1.3	The department is committed to increasing knowledge and understanding of the histories, cultures and experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia.	Yes	–	Yes	–
1.1.4	The department will provide Aboriginal cultural education for all staff and education about Aboriginal Australia for all students, as it is everybody's business.	Yes	–	–	–

Policy dot point	Policy outcome	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
1.1.5	The strength, diversity, ownership and richness of Aboriginal cultures and Custodianship of Country are respected, valued and promoted.	Yes	Yes	Yes	–
1.1.6	The department is committed to collaborative decision making with Aboriginal Peoples, parents, caregivers, families and their communities.	–	–	Yes	–
1.1.7	The department recognises the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc.) as the peak Community advisory body to the department on Aboriginal education at all levels and in all stages of planning and decision making.	–	–	Yes	–
1.1.8	These commitments affirm the inherent right of Aboriginal students to fair, equitable, culturally inclusive and significant educational opportunities so that all students obtain a high quality education as a platform for enriching their life chances and achieving their full potential.				
1.1.9	Aboriginal education and training is core business for all staff.	Yes	Yes	–	–
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Aboriginal education involves continuous, lifelong learning. It includes:</b>				
1.2.1	Delivery of quality education to Aboriginal students in schools (including, where relevant, preschools)	–	Yes	–	Yes
1.2.2	Education about Aboriginal Australia for all students	Yes	–	–	–
1.2.3	Mandatory Aboriginal cultural education through professional learning and career development experiences for all staff	Yes	–	–	–
1.2.4	Identifying and engaging the NSW AECG Inc. and Aboriginal communities as partners in Aboriginal education	–	–	Yes	–
<b>1.3</b>	<b>The department values the skills, experiences and knowledge of Aboriginal people and will:</b>				
1.3.1	Increase the participation and retention of Aboriginal students in schools.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



Policy dot point	Policy outcome	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
1.3.2	Increase employment, promotional opportunities and retention of Aboriginal people in a broad range of positions across all areas of the department.	Yes	–	–	–
1.3.3	Engage the NSW AECG Inc. and Aboriginal communities as partners in Aboriginal education.	–	–	Yes	–
<b>1.4</b>	<b>The department will improve lifelong learning pathways for Aboriginal learners. This will include transitions:</b>				
1.4.1	From home to school.	–	–	–	Yes
1.4.2	Through primary and secondary education.	–	–	–	Yes
1.4.3	From school into further study and employment.	–	–	–	Yes
<b>1.5</b>	<b>The department in partnership with the NSW AECG Inc. and Aboriginal communities and organisations will:</b>				
1.5.1	Value and acknowledge the identities of Aboriginal students.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1.5.2	Provide supportive and culturally inclusive learning environments for Aboriginal students.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
1.5.3	Assist Aboriginal students to access educational opportunities in a range of settings.	–	Yes	Yes	Yes
1.5.4	Implement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal studies program</li> <li>- Aboriginal languages programs</li> <li>- Aboriginal cross-curriculum content within schools</li> <li>- Aboriginal perspectives in education.</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	–	–
1.5.5	Incorporate the cultural contexts, values and practices of local Aboriginal communities into the mainstream delivery of education.	–	Yes	–	–

Policy dot point	Policy outcome	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
<b>1.6</b>	<b>The department will consult with local Aboriginal communities and support teachers to:</b>				
1.6.1	Develop and demonstrate their high expectations of all Aboriginal students.	–	–	–	Yes
1.6.2	Engage and motivate Aboriginal students for successful participation in education.	–	–	–	Yes
1.6.3	Encourage Aboriginal students to pursue personal excellence, including a commitment to learning.	–	–	–	Yes
1.6.4	Use quality teaching and assessment practices and resources that are culturally inclusive.	–	Yes	–	Yes
1.6.5	Enable Aboriginal students to achieve age appropriate syllabus outcomes in schools.	–	Yes	–	Yes
1.6.6	Provide all students with opportunities to develop deeper understandings of Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aboriginal studies.</li> <li>- Aboriginal languages.</li> <li>- Aboriginal cross-curriculum content in schools.</li> </ul>	Yes	–	–	–
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Working together to build capacity within Aboriginal communities</b>				
1.7.1	The department will work with other government agencies and non-government organisations to build capacity within Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal people participate as equal partners in education.	–	–	Yes	–
<b>1.8</b>	<b>Training and assistance</b>				
1.8.1	The department will provide appropriate and relevant training and resources to assist with the implementation of this policy in line with the key focus of achieving improved educational outcomes in Aboriginal education.	Yes	Yes	–	–

## Appendix B:

# Links between the NSW AECG Inc. Partnership Agreement 2020-2030 specific outcomes and themes

The partnership agreement outlines the shared commitment of the NSW Department of Education and NSW AECG Inc. to ensuring that every Aboriginal child and young person in NSW achieves their potential through education. The partnership agreement identifies specific outcomes for schools, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, non-Aboriginal students, teachers and other staff. Each outcome has been mapped to the themes in this paper that most closely align to it, to assist schools to engage with the partnership agreement.

**Table 2**  
**Links to NSW AECG Inc. Partnership Agreement 2020-2030**

Partnership agreement outcomes	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
<b>Schools</b>				
Parents and carers of Aboriginal children will find schools welcoming and respectful places.	Yes	–	Yes	–
Aboriginal languages are part of every school and pre-school curriculum.	Yes	Yes	–	–
Technology allows children and young people to learn the Language or Languages of their Peoples, wherever they live.	–	Yes	–	–
Aboriginal children and young people are equally represented in achieving a HSC with an ATAR at the same level or better than the whole population of their peers.	–	Yes	–	Yes
Aboriginal children and young people are equally represented in gaining places in further education at the same level or better than the whole population of their peers.	–	Yes	–	Yes
<b>Aboriginal students</b>				
Aboriginal students find schools to be engaging, culturally safe places to learn.	Yes	Yes	–	–

Partnership agreement outcomes	Culturally safe schools	Culturally responsive teaching	Positive relationships	Personalised learning
Aboriginal students believe that they can succeed at school and they do succeed.	Yes	–		Yes
Aboriginal students are confident in their heritage, cultures and languages.	Yes	–		Yes
<b>Non-Aboriginal students</b>				
Every student in NSW understands the heritage and culture of the Aboriginal Peoples on whose land/s they live.	Yes	Yes	Yes	–
Every student in NSW leaves school with an understanding of Aboriginal heritage and culture and the history of the interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.	Yes	Yes	Yes	–
<b>Teachers</b>				
All teachers have completed Aboriginal cultural awareness training, with refresher courses every three years.	Yes	Yes	Yes	–
All teachers demonstrate that they understand Aboriginal parents/families have high expectations for their children and all teachers work in collaboration with parents/caregivers and communities to ensure Aboriginal students achieve these expectations.	Yes	–	Yes	Yes
<b>Other staff</b>				
Senior positions have been identified and created for Aboriginal educational leaders across a wide range of levels of the department.	Yes	–	–	–
Panels established for the recruitment and selection processes in education have a representative of Aboriginal Peoples through the inclusion of a representative of the NSW AECG.	Yes	–	Yes	–
All non-teaching staff complete Aboriginal cultural awareness training, with refresher courses every three years.	Yes	–	Yes	–

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# About the artworks



**E Williams**  
Coniston Public School

'Mt Keira Mob' – all the mobs gathering on Mt Keira at sunset.



**AJ Bangura**  
Wilkins Public School

Land + Ocean – 'Wajarr and Gaagal' – I am a young Gumbaynggirr boy and my painting represents that I come from the place of the ocean and live on the land in the city and have people around me to connect me to my culture.



**M Roberts**  
Ashcroft High School

Traditional food from my tribe 'Bundjalung'. Black beans off the coast of Lismore.



**M Brindle**  
Ashfield Public School

Connections – the small marks are people and the larger bands are those people coming together. It is about connections.



**W Conrick**  
Redhead Public School

'Yimaliko' which means 'encourage' in Awabakal language. Whether I'm at school with my friends, at home with my mob or in the community I encourage everyone to talk, listen and be kind. This drawing represents where I live on 'Awabakal Country'. The sand, water and Redhead Bluff are drawn with a central meeting place in the middle.

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