ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF NSW

The Waratah Project

Evaluation Report
February 2022

murawin
CREATE IMPACT

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Country and pay respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that call NSW home and are part of the overall education system that the Waratah Project is connected to.

We pay our respect to Elders, Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout NSW.

We recognise their continued connection to Country and that this connection can be seen through a living culture that should be enabled to thrive and provide strong social and educational foundations for Aboriginal students and their communities in NSW.

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We recognise the importance of truth telling, a reckoning and the telling of the whole story and we continue to assert in our work that NSW was, is and always will be Aboriginal land.

We give thanks to all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and in particualar students who participated in this Evaluation and are engaged with the Waratah Project.

Abbotsleigh

Barker College

Calrossy Anglican School

Canberra Grammar School

Carinya Christian School – Tamworth

Casino Christian School

Casino High School

Kempsey Adventist School

Kinross Wolaroi School

Knox Grammar School

Loreto Normanhurst

Macleay Vocational College

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School

Namoi Valley Christian School

Narromine Christian School

New England Girls' School

Pymble Ladies' College

Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview

The Scots College

SHORE (Sydney Church of England Grammar School)

St Andrew's Cathedral School

St Catherine's School

St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill

Taree Christian College

Wellington Christian School

1. Executive summary

Context and background information

The Waratah Project supports 25 independent schools in New South Wales to improve outcomes for 1097 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Led by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), the project's goal was to develop and implement strategies that would improve the literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes of this cohort of students. The Project also involves support for student wellbeing and the strengthening of relationships with their families and communities.

The Project represents a significant investment through the Australian Government's Choice and Affordability Fund and AISNSW. AISNSW recognised the importance of determining the Project's appropriateness and effectiveness and that undertaking a thorough and comprehensive measurement of the Project's progress is critical to maximising impact.

Murawin was engaged by AISNSW to undertake an independent evaluation of the Project to date. The Evaluation specifically addressed how well the Waratah Project has delivered on its intended outcomes and whether there are any changes that can or should be made to further enhance the Project. The Evaluation was guided by principles of collaboration, cultural contextualisation and high standards of cultural safety and ethics. Through transparency and open dialogue, Murawin established strong working relationships and professional trust with the AISNSW and the Waratah schools. Protocols relating to Indigenous cultural and intellectual property and data sovereignty ensured that Indigenous people's data genuinely reflects their priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity.

Evaluation method

The design and delivery of the Evaluation plan was underpinned by culturally contextual methodologies and culturally safe engagement tools that built on the existing pilot evaluation report and Waratah Outcomes Framework, developed by the Jumbunna Institute, University of Technology, Sydney. The framework is guided by four sets of outcomes: student, relationships, staff and school. Murawin then guided key staff at the 25 participating Waratah schools to facilitate school-run focus groups with 112 staff and led online focus groups in four case study schools with Indigenous students and staff.

This report is purposefully focussed on stories from the schools, providing readers with a sense of how the Project is experienced on the ground by students and staff. Case studies of schools' holistic approaches, or specific activities and the associated outcomes are included as tangible examples. This report:

- details the evaluation findings against the Project outcomes

- highlights what aspects of the Project are working well

- determines how the Project can be enhanced to further embed outcomes in both existing and future schools

- provides feedback on project performance at school level

- provides feedback on the collective experience of participating schools.

The evaluation found that the Project has achieved overwhelming positive change and there is evidence of progress towards all ten outcomes. Whilst only four years into delivery, the Project is already making strides towards the long-term intended outcomes and contribution to enhanced Indigenous self-determination and a more socially just society.

Project priorities and findings

All participating schools are required to include outcome 1 'students have improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes' as a priority area, with an additional two identified by schools through a needs assessment or 'environmental scan' undertaken as part of their project planning. As shown in Table 3, all schools except one listed outcome 1 Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes as the highest priority, with the secondary focus on outcomes 4, 5 and 10, whereas other priorities were relatively distributed[1].

There is obvious duplication of, and alignment between the activities delivered by individual schools to achieve their three priority outcomes. It is also apparent in discussions with the AISNSW and schools that they both view the Project as a holistic response to change and have the intention to deliver it as such.

It is evident from schools' final reports that literacy and numeracy and other academic outcomes improved as a result of student's participation in the Project. In particular, strategies such as providing tailored academic support, ensuring student wellbeing, and prioritising cultural safety provided students with the tools and guidance they needed to improve in their learning. This is indicative of the interrelated nature of academic success and student wellbeing, speaking the need for a holistic approach when seeking to improve academic outcomes.

The tailored academic support initiative was referenced as the most prevalent strategy of the Project in improving literacy and academic outcomes, highlighting the need for schools to provide personalised approaches to literacy and numeracy support structures to enable student success and growth.

As shown in Table 3 in Section 4.2, schools have delivered a myriad of activities, the most cited being literacy and numeracy programs. However, the baseline testing and personalised learning plans (PLP) are often those initially undertaken to identify a student's individual learning profile, their aspirations and current academic standing. This then enables schools to determine the most appropriate interventions and opportunities for each individual student, as well as undertaking ongoing monitoring to gauge their academic progress.

It was found that cultural safety and belonging underpin all student outcomes and relationships and support from Indigenous staff and role models were highlighted as key drivers of positive student experiences. It was felt that schools have made a concerted effort to establish and maintain strong and culturally informed relationships. These relationships have generated an environment of cultural safety and belonging, developed the trust of families in the schools' ability to support and educate their child, and supported staff's knowledge, commitment, and confidence in classroom environments.

> *Boys and their families recognise that we are really in a partnership with them. Our lines of communication are very open between the families and the college… When I attend the Indigenous family nights or when I email families, I pick up a sense that the families feel really positive towards what [the school] is trying to achieve with their sons. The Waratah Project has allowed families to engage more easily and feel connected… and that has a positive flow on effect to the boys who really appreciate the times when their families can attend the college… This allows the families to see first-hand the caring and positive environment that [the school] provides for their sons. And the partnership that develops between the school and the family definitely results in students being more motivated, and accountable for their learning… (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)*

The professional development provided through the Project contributed to increased staff confidence to enhance their capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices. It was felt that in general, Indigenous culture and perspectives were progressively being acknowledged, valued and integrated into

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[1] Some schools provided detail on evidence in their final reports, that differ to their identified priority outcomes. As such, there is misalignment between Table 3 and the data provided against each outcome.

curriculum and school life.

Importantly, the Evaluation found that the Hub and Spoke model of the Project underpins holistic success and is highly valued by participating schools. This model involved the organisation of participants into networks of schools, where those that have been part of the Project for longer, support and mentor the newer schools in their journey. This allowed for the sharing of resources within the broader network. Most schools felt that personal connections, relationships and collaborative learning were the most prevalent outcomes.

There's lots of benefits to the Waratah Project … in terms of putting it on the table where really, we haven't had a focus before in terms of Indigenous perspectives in our curriculum, but also as part of our community as well. And it's provided an opportunity and belief to create some change in the school… we didn't actually have links with before that we now have. And that connection, I can say, is so important for us as a school community, but particularly important for our Indigenous students and… Aboriginal parents as well… (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)

Recommended strategies and Considerations for enhancement and expansion

This Evaluation sees the strategies provided below as key to the Project's enhancement and expansion, and the actions schools may consider when evaluating their existing approach, or in the design of the Project for those commencing their journey. These have been determined through a holistic view of the insights across all outcomes, as well as the those that relate to the collaborative approach, a changing landscape and the enablers and barriers to success.

Strategies and actions for a successful approach

Strategy	Action	Pilot
Enhance appropriate academic supports	Provide extra support for students in last years of primary school and first years of secondary school	
	Invest in tutoring and mentoring activities, seek advice from students if attendance is low or outcomes not being achieved	
	Allow classroom teachers to provide coaching and mentoring to students	
	Consider the emphasis on testing if creating excessive pressure on Indigenous students, or less frequent testing to measure progress over a longer timeframe	✓
	Engage literacy and numeracy specialists	
	Encourage and facilitate greater uptake of available supports	
Invest initial efforts in developing and embedding cultural competency	Start with reflection and involve the whole school to understand what they know about culture and how culturally safe the school environment is. This can be done internally, or with support from an external cultural consultant.	✓
	Determine if additional or a different approach to cultural competancy training and development is an appropriate use of Project funding, particuarly in the early phase of delivery e.g., new schools.	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
Invest in staff development and capacity building	Think of cultural competency and cultural training as a journey, it needs to get deeper as knowledge, skills and confidence grows e.g., cultural competency as a foundation, moving to culturally responsive pedagogy and training that focusses on socio-political learning.	✓
	Think outside the box of formalised training e.g., allow for staff to share learnings and cross-pollinate ideas at staff meetings.	
	Use Indigenous staff as guidance, but ensure it is part of their role and doesn't create the burden of cultural load.	
	Consider Stronger Smarter Leadership Program as a core inclusion in a school's Professional Development strategy.	
	Provide training that equips staff with the practical skills to increase their confidence to appropriately engage with students, families, and communities.	✓
Ensure that Indigenous people are well represented and accessible to students	Consider Indigenous staff and the engagement of external representative when undertaking Project planning and budget allocations, particularly where there is an ability to increase existing FTE's or recruit for additional staff	✓
	Engage a diversity of Indigenous role models and mentors, including those that can support students with learning, culture and wellbeing	
	Invite Indigenous guest speakers to school events that aren't just focussed on culture, and involve all students. For example, bring in an Indigenous professional to speak on their subject matter and life experieinces rather than explicity about culture.	
	Maintain relationships with school alumni and identify opportunties for them to play a role in supporting current students	
Centre the Indigenous perspective and experience	Utilise the knowledge Indigenous staff and external cultural liasons and the appropriate cultural authories to understand the diveristy of community protcals and sensitives and those relevant for each student	
	Engage a diversity of Indigenous role models and mentors, including those that can support students with learning, culture and wellbeing	
	Invest in Indigenous literature, curriculum content, expand Indigenous specific subjects and the integration of culture into traditional subjects	
Invest in enduring relationships and	Engage with people outside of a student's family unit and the school network and community, including Elders.	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
partnerships	Establish reference groups with representatives from home and local communities, including Elders to: • have a touchpoint on situations and challenges that may affect how a child participates in school life • collectively identify solutions • codesign programs and activities. • gain the appropriate authority on the aspects of culture that can and should be incorporated into school life.	
	Maintain regular contact and engagement with families throughout a students journey	✓
Prioritise personalised student planning	Ensure that enrolment processes include the collection of cultural background information on students (e.g., through intake forms and interviews)	
	Create a structured transition program, and one that is prolonged (e.g., over a full school year) if required by an individual student	
	Focus on getting to know the student from the start of their schooling journey and provide opportunities for staff directly involved in their transition to build relationships early (e.g., rather than just through initial interviews)	
	Incorporate students' interests early so that they can be provided supports and opportunities aligned to their future study and career aspirations.	
	Encourage the active involement of classroom teachers in all aspects of student support e.g., ensure they are participating in meetings regarding a student's wellbeing not just accademic successes or challenges	
View the development of student's capabilities through a holistic lens	Prioritise social and emotional learning and wellbeing	
	Build life skills in addition to academic learning e.g., managing time, budgeting, life outside the Boarding house.	
	Seek to understand and manage experiences and feelings common among Indigenous students e.g., shame and tall poppy syndrome	
	Expose students to a diversity of experiences and opportunities and expand their worldview	
	Cultivate leadership skills and independence	
	Foster critical thinking skills, self-directed learning, and initiative	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
	Avoid imposing uniform expectations or Western definitions of success	
Institute a culture of data and measurement	Invest in a high-quality tool and upskill staff in its use and value e.g., educate staff on how to leverage data to provide more appropriate learning or wellbeing support	✓
	Ensure there is alignment between the overarching tool and those that are used to collect data e.g., a consistent suite of tools that support holistic and robust collection and useable outputs	
	Provide opportunities for staff to engage in professional dialogue and development in the use of data.	
	Ensure data collection tools and activities are wide reaching and test and measure progress beyond academic outcomes	
	Consider the appropriateness of standard benchmarks	
Widen the scope of cultural activities, celebrations and use of culture	Identify times in the school year where events and actitives can be delivered, rather than exclusively holding them during established celebration times.	
	Design and run a diversity of events and actitivites, or provide options for people to participate in different ways	
	Deliver cultural learning opportunities for the wider community, e.g. through hosting more public events	
	Use social media (e.g. Instagram and Facebook) and other contemporary communication methods to publicise cultural events and activities to help get the message out to the broader community (Abbotsleigh).	
	Where schools have multiple campuses ensure that events and activities are available to all students, families and staff. For example, ensure that primary aged students can participate in events, even if the Project is delivered within the secondary school.	

Conclusion

Ultimately the Project has resulted in a positive impact on student outcomes and anoticeable difference in the cultural competency across both a whole of school environment and the wider community. The Evaluation has demonstrated that the approach of the AISNSW and the delivery of the Project within schools is working. Schools and their staff clearly have the desire and the drive to continue to grow and learn together with students as genuine recipients of change. As such, this Evaluation finds that the Project is on its way to contributing to the intended impact of enhanced Indigenous self-determination and a more socially just society.

2. Introduction

2.1 The report ahead

Murawin has been engaged by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) to undertake an independent evaluation (the Evaluation) of the Waratah Project (the Project) – a comprehensive project aimed at supporting NSW independent schools[2] to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (students[3]).

Guided by the Commonwealth Government's *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* and funded through the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's Choice and Affordability Fund, the Project began life in 2016 as a pilot program titled *Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students* (the Pilot). The Pilot was firstly implemented in four independent schools in NSW (Phase 1), including initiatives to support student wellbeing and strengthen relationships with their families and communities. The pilot project's goals were underpinned by the priorities of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015[4]. Building on the success and learnings from the Pilot, AISNSW commenced Phase 2 in May 2019. The 12-month project extended project schools from four to 16, involving 12 boarding schools and four-day schools, one of which was a government school. Four schools were situated in rural New South Wales with 12 in urban areas (11 in Sydney and one in the Australian Capital Territory).

This expansion was facilitated by a 'Hub-and-Spoke' network model, whereby the original Pilot schools (the 'Hubs') were able to play a guidance role for the newly onboarded schools (the 'Spokes') by sharing their learning and offering advice around some of the challenges, leading to the development of communities of learning.

The Project expanded in July 2020 to 25 schools[5]. This was the commencement of the Waratah Project. A timeline of schools' commencement with the Project is shown in Section 2.1.2 . As of December 2021, the Project is being delivered within 25 schools, across five networks. It interacts with 1125 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 3,535 staff and 84 Indigenous staff, both teaching and non-teaching. A breakdown of the participating schools, details of their student and staff population and other school characteristics is provided in Appendix B.

The Project is oriented around the Waratah Outcomes Framework (the Framework) outlined in Section 2.2. It includes four focus areas across students, relationships, staff and school with ten outcomes. It also articulates the overarching intended impact of enhanced Indigenous self-determination and a more

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[2] In the Australian context, there are, in effect, three distinct school sectors. The first distinction to be made is between government and non-government schools, but the latter could be further disaggregated into systemic and independent schools. Systemic schools are those run in a centralised way by the Catholic Church, while independent schools are each run as their own entities with a degree of leeway to determine their own priorities.

[3] The use of 'students' throughout this report is in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, where are their non-Indigenous peers will be noted as such.

[4] Australian Government Department of Education and Training. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015

[5] All Waratah schools are part of the independent school sector apart from one government school in Casino NSW. The inclusion of the latter is owing to the AISNSW's belief that the Waratah Project is not just applicable to independent schools but has the potential to cross-sectoral due to its flexible delivery model and a more localised approach in government schools.

socially just society. The Framework was developed by AISNSW in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute (see section 2.2.2) in response to the pilot evaluation.

This Evaluation identifies progress towards the Framework, from the pilot project through to the establishment and delivery of the Waratah project up to December 2021. This evaluation report (the report) comprehensively documents findings against each outcome, highlighting what aspects of the Project are working well and how it can be enhanced to further embed outcomes in both existing and future schools. Crucially, this report provides feedback not just at the school level but also in relation to the collective experiences of schools, particularly as the Project is underpinned by a collaborative model that is intended to be applicable to a diverse range schools and contexts.

This report is purposefully focussed on stories from school communities, providing readers with a sense of how the Project is experienced on the ground by students and staff. Case studies of schools' holistic approach, or specific activities and the associated outcomes are included as tangible examples.

The project's goal was to develop and implement strategies that would improve the literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes of these students, including initiatives to support student wellbeing and strengthening of relationships with their families and communities. The pilot project's goal were underpinned by the priorities of the National Aboriginal Tress Islander Education Strategy 2015[6]

2.1.1 A collaborative approach

A key feature of Phase 2 was the organisation of the 16 schools into four networks of 4 schools. With the commencement of the Waratah project in July 2020, this increased to five networks. This network model has been coined 'a collaborative approach'.

The networks currently include Phase 1 schools, that act as a 'Hub' to support and mentor three 'Spoke' schools through shared learnings and experiences. This includes working with Spoke schools to identify appropriate priorities and strategies and address challenges with implementation.[7] It also allows for cross-school development and sharing of resources within the broader network.

Separate to the individual networks, all participating schools collaborate as a collective through Project meetings and other engagement activities. This is generally led by AISNSW. However, schools often engage with each other outside of formal events.

2.1.2 Moving forward from outcomes to impact

In November 2021, AISNSW were advised that the Project is to be expanded from 2022 through ongoing funding from the Australian Government's *Choice and Affordability Fund* (CAF). This enables participating schools to continue their involvement until December 2025 and sees the network expanded by five schools each year for the next four years, taking the Project to 45 schools and nine networks across NSW by 2025.

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[6] Australian Government Department of Education and Training. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy - Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government (dese.gov.au)

[7] Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: AISNSW Pilot Project Phase 2, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, UTS, August 2020
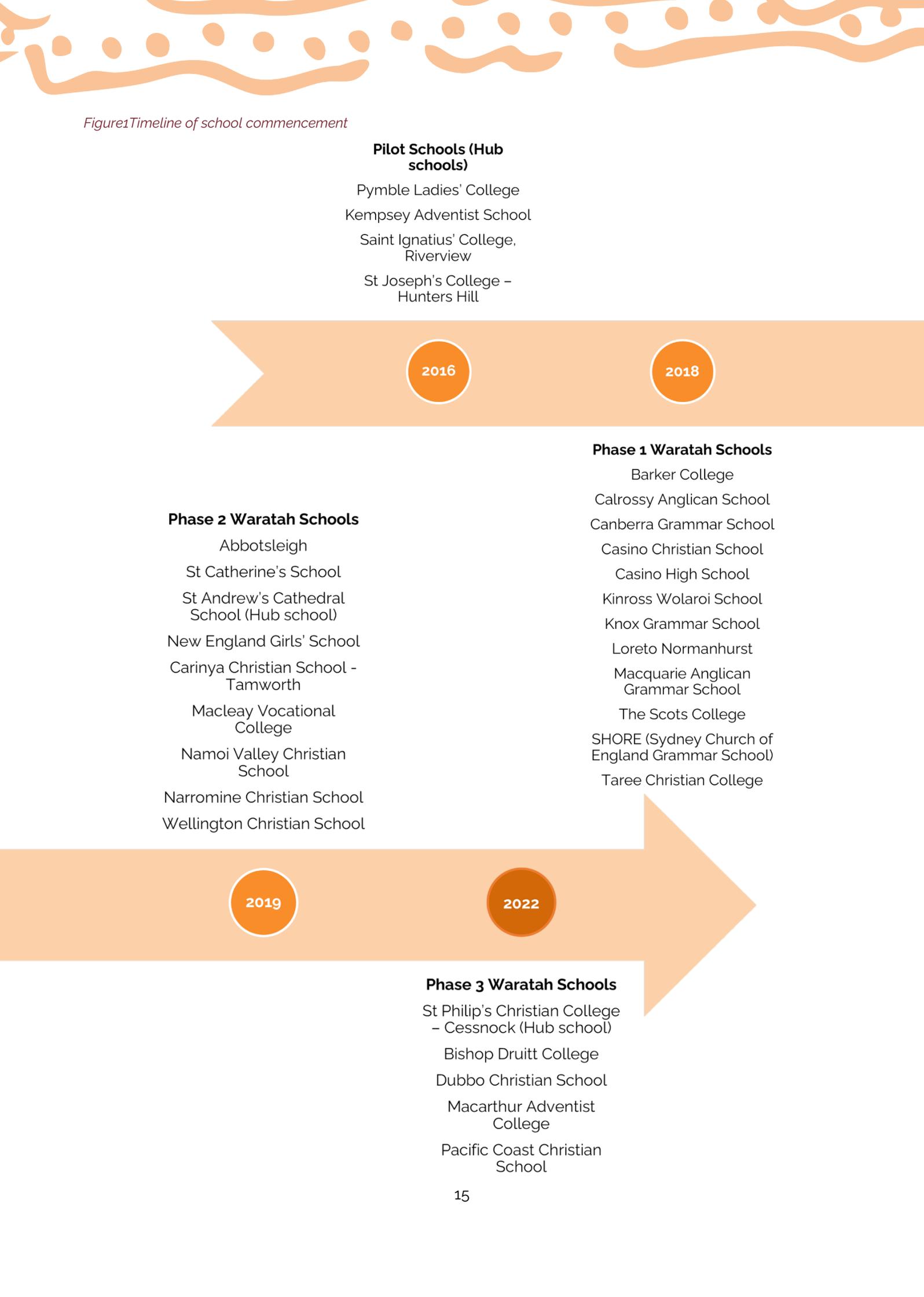
Pilot Schools (Hub schools)

Pymble Ladies' College

Kempsey Adventist School

Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview

St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill

2016   **2018**

Phase 1 Waratah Schools

Barker College

Calrossy Anglican School

Canberra Grammar School

Casino Christian School

Casino High School

Kinross Wolaroi School

Knox Grammar School

Loreto Normanhurst

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School

The Scots College

SHORE (Sydney Church of England Grammar School)

Taree Christian College

Phase 2 Waratah Schools

Abbotsleigh

St Catherine's School

St Andrew's Cathedral School (Hub school)

New England Girls' School

Carinya Christian School - Tamworth

Macleay Vocational College

Namoi Valley Christian School

Narromine Christian School

Wellington Christian School

2019   **2022**

Phase 3 Waratah Schools

St Philip's Christian College – Cessnock (Hub school)

Bishop Druitt College

Dubbo Christian School

Macarthur Adventist College

Pacific Coast Christian School

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2.2 Outcomes of the pilot project

2.2.1 Background information of Phase 2 pilot project

AISNSW recognised that thorough and comprehensive measurement of the Project's progress was critical to maximising impact and ensuring learnings were shared across the sector. The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney was engaged to undertake an external evaluation of the Project for Phase 2 of the pilot project up to March 2020,

The second phase of the pilot evaluation coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, which severely impacted all aspects of school life including schools' capacity to implement and evaluate project activities as they grappled with the enormous changes to school functioning through this period. It was decided that because of this situation, the evaluation would cease when students were transferred to remote and online learning from home.

The previous evaluations indicated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in the Project achieved marked improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes, as well as in other areas such as their aspiration for school and further education success. The evaluation also provided AISNSW with lessons that served the Project going forward, the most pertinent of which include:

- **Leadership** is key. The Project works best when there is an active interest and genuine commitment from school leaders.

- Success is more likely when the Project is undertaken as an integrated, **whole-of-school** initiative, rather than seen as a discreet activity or confined to its own separate silo.

- **Relationships** are key, including between students, families, teaching staff and non-teaching staff.

- Literacy and numeracy outcomes require **targeted and individualised learning support** informed by accurate student data.

- The **role of Indigenous staff**, both teaching and non-teaching (e.g., cultural mentors) are critical to the success of the Project.

- The **Hub-and-Spoke model** works well and should be continued.

- **Ongoing funding mitigates challenges and pressures** relating to time, resourcing, funding, staff coordination and effective use of student data.

2.2.2 The Waratah Outcomes Framework

The pilot evaluation also included the co-design of an innovative, holistic outcomes-based evaluation framework: **the Waratah Outcomes Framework**. The Framework drew upon Phase 1 outcomes and learnings as well as policy and research evidence to identify ten high level outcomes across four domains: students, stakeholder relationships, staff, and whole-of-school, as well as a core and several accompanying impacts. The Framework was conceptualised to convey a positive narrative of strength and resilience and the ongoing potential for growth and development across the ten outcomes.

This Evaluation is also guided by the Framework, which is outlined below:

Waratah Outcomes Framework

Impact: Enhanced Indigenous self-determination and a more socially just society

- enhanced outcomes and experiences for Indigenous people
- increased respect and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and culture throughout the community
- increased Indigenous voices in community culture and decision-making.

Student outcomes: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have improved educational, socio-cultural and well-being outcomes

1. students experience a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment
2. students are confidently engaged in their learning and have improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes
3. students have increased aspirations and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities
4. students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage
5. students have improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Relationship outcomes: relationships between key stakeholders (in schools and the wider community) have become stronger and more culturally informed

6. relationships between school, family and community are strengthened and culturally informed
7. relationships between staff and students are strengthened and culturally informed.

Staff outcomes: school leadership and staff are engaged, supportive and culturally competent towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

8. staff have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices
9. school leadership is engaged, supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

School outcomes

10. Indigenous cultures and perspectives are acknowledged, valued and integrated into curriculum and school life.

The Framework underpins all aspects of the Project. However, it is crucial to note that schools select priority areas and undertake activities that best suit their circumstances and are empowered to individually contextualise their approach. Hence, the Framework is intended to be flexible.

3. Evaluation methodology

3.1 Purpose and scope

The Project represents a significant investment by the Australian Government and AISNSW. Hence, it is important to determine the Project's appropriateness and effectiveness, ensuring it has delivered positive and sustainable outcomes for all intended beneficiaries. The Evaluation also looked at the structural and practical elements of the Project, consequently the Evaluation is centred around the following questions and objectives:

Table 1 Evaluation questions and objectives

Evaluation questions	Evaluation objectives
How well has the Waratah Project delivered on its intended outcomes	• Understand how the Project was implemented at a program and individual school level, including what may have underpinned or undermined success. • Measure the success of the Project to date, with reference to the four domains: students, stakeholder relationships, staff, and whole-of-school. • Highlight cases where the Project has worked particularly well. • Identify unintended or unanticipated changes as a result of the Project or context in which is it delivered.
Are there changes that can or should be made to the current program (or for future delivery)	• Identify challenges and potential considerations for further development to assist AISNSW with their approach, and the design and delivery of the Project in existing and future schools. • Determine ways to better meet the intended outcomes of the Waratah Outcomes Framework.

This Evaluation is predominantly person-centred and focussed on experiences and outcomes. It is augmented by a high-level lens-on process, with a particular emphasis on the collaborative approach, which comprises of AISNSW's way of working with schools and coordinating the Project, as well as the Hub-and-Spoke model.

The Evaluation also sought to build capacity of participating schools to take part in future evaluations and undertake internal monitoring and reporting activities.

The Evaluation will satisfy the Australian Government reporting requirements, allowing the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to assess the Project's merits. It will also provide pragmatic and meaningful lessons and recommendations, through what might be termed "transferrable learnings". These will allow and empower existing and future Waratah schools and other non-participating schools across Australia to increase their cultural responsiveness and enhance their support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

3.2   Approach to the Evaluation

3.2.1 Guiding principles

The following principles guided the Evaluation, ensuring it was collaborative, culturally contextual and conducted to the highest standard of cultural safety and ethics. The principles have been determined using the following best practice guidance

- *Ethical Protocol for evaluation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settings*

- AIATSIS *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*

- Productivity Commission *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*

- Australasian Evaluation Society *First Nations Cultural Safety Framework*,

3.2.2 Our approach to the project

Partnership approach

Through transparency and open dialogue, the Murawin team established strong working relationships and professional trust with the AISNSW and Waratah schools. Throughout the life of the project the Murawin team maintained ongoing communication, ensuring a collaborative approach to project delivery and decision making. This principle has been enacted through the Evaluation's need to adapt to the challenges faced by both the AISNSW and schools through the changing landscape and varied COVID-19 responses and restrictions.

Culturally safe and contextual approach

The design and delivery of the Evaluation is underpinned by culturally contextual methodologies and culturally safe engagement tools and approaches. All Murawin staff are trained in cultural competency and have extensive experience engaging with Indigenous people. All research deliverables are quality assured and reviewed by Murawin's Chief Executive Officer, Dunghutti woman Carol Vale, ensuring cultural integrity and cultural sensitivities and protocols respected and incorporated.

Engagement with schools prioritised cultural safety. For example, focus group and workshop discussions coupled a traditional question and answer approach with Yarning, an Indigenous way of learning and oral storytelling. Murawin's researchers were also mindful of daddiri[8] - which means that deep listening is just as important as talking through questions. Schools and students were encouraged to see their participation as an opportunity for them to tell their stories and share their experiences, as opposed to a mere exercise in monitoring to justify ongoing funding.

3.2.3 Ethical considerations

The Evaluation did not seek formal ethics approval. However, all Murawin team members are experienced and knowledgeable in ethical research practices and the Evaluation strictly abided by the previously listed best practice standards and guidance.

Protocols relating to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Data Sovereignty were embedded through collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination, potential future use and storage. This includes ensuring that Indigenous people's data genuinely reflects their priorities, values, cultures, worldviews, and diversity.

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[8] The word, concept and spiritual practice that is dadirri (da-did-ee) is from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia).Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr

While this Evaluation included some discussions with students, the following strategies were put in place to ensure their safety and the appropriateness of their participation:

- Consent sought from parents and/or guardians.

- Discussion guide was high-level and did not include sensitive questions, rather focused generally on experience and culture. It was reviewed and approved by both AISNSW and each individual school.

- Five focus groups with students were conducted online with an AISNSW staff member, an Indigenous staff member (from each school), a teaching staff member and in one case a student's parent was present.

3.3 Methodology

Murawin's full methodology is outlined in Chapter 10, as a summary it includes:

- **Evaluation Plan,** developed through a review of the Jumbunna pilot evaluation report and Framework, other select program documentation and collaborative planning with AISNSW.

- **Internal school-run focus groups in all 25 participating schools,** including the development of a focus group guidance document and a full day workshop to build capacity of key staff across the Waratah schools to run their own focus groups. Each school facilitated an in-person focus group comprising up to 7 teaching and non-teaching staff. In total, 112 staff members participated in the focus groups across all schools.

- **Compilation of reports from all 25 Waratah schools,** based on a reporting template designed by AISNSW and Murawin.

- **Attendance at three Waratah project meetings** to refine Evaluation approach, build relationships and buy in, generate data and test and validate findings.

- **Murawin-led focus groups in four[9] select case study schools.** Online focus groups were conducted with Indigenous students and staff and the non-Indigenous teacher responsible for the Waratah project. An AISNSW staff member also attended all focus groups as an observer.

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[9] Six focus groups were planned but only four conducted due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19

4. Progress against Waratah Outcomes Framework

All participating schools are required to include Outcome 1, that 'students have improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes' as a priority area, with an additional two outcomes identified by schools through a needs assessment or 'environmental scan' undertaken as part of their project planning. As shown in Table 3, all schools except one listed Outcome 1 Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes as the highest priority, with the secondary focus on Outcomes 4, 5 and 10, whereas other priorities were relatively distributed[10].

There is obvious duplication of, and alignment between the activities delivered by individual schools to achieve their three priority outcomes. It is also apparent in discussions with the AISNSW and schools that they both view the Project as a holistic response to change and have the intention to deliver it as such. Further, the pilot evaluation expressed the holistic response as a critical finding and provided the following commentary:

> Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic outcomes requires targeted and individualised learning support within a holistic understanding of and responsiveness to students' capabilities and needs. Phase 1 schools therefore directly targeted students' academic development while also building strong relationships with the student's family and community, and providing culturally sensitive personal, spiritual, social, and physical support.

> This approach aligned with a holistic, Indigenous Australian world view in which "the interdependence of teaching and learning with cultural identity, physical, spiritual and mental health, and family and community belonging means that to have relevance, any intervention in one area must include all others"[11].

As such, the suite of activities delivered by schools inherently support either multiple or all other outcomes.

Table 2   Prioritised outcomes across the 25 participating schools

Focus area	Outcome	Priority (number of participating schools)			
		High	**Medium**	**Low**	**N/A**
Students	1 Students have improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes	24	1	0	0
	2 Students experience a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment	8	4	4	9

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[10] Some schools provided detail on evidence in their final reports, that differ to their identified priority outcomes. As such, there is misalignment between Table 3 and the data provided against each outcome.

[11] Craven, R., Ryan, R., Mooney, J., Vallerand, R., Dillon, A., Blacklock, F. & Magson, N. (2016). Towards a positive psychology of Indigenous thriving and reciprocal research partnership model, Contemporary Educational Psychology, 47, 32-43.

	3	Students have increased aspirations and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities	2	11	3	9
	4	Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage	11	10	1	3
	5	Students have improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing	12	8	1	4
Relationships	6	Relationships between school, family and community are strengthened and culturally informed	12	9	1	3
	7	Relationships between staff and students are strengthened and culturally informed	9	9	2	5
Staff	8	Staff have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices	6	11	3	5
	9	School leadership is engaged, supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Indigenous students	7	12	1	5
School	10	Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life	9	11	0	5

4.1 Improved educational, sociocultural and wellbeing outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students (Core student outcomes)

This Evaluation is qualitative in nature, with quantitative data on educational outcomes provided in high-level summaries of implemented strategies and impact statements. Schools provided examples in their final reports relating to individual priority outcomes. The data indicates that as a collective, students who interact with the Project experience improved their academic outcomes, with many schools indicating that the Project has resulted in *massive changes (Taree Christian College).*

> *It's really clear just with the data that we're gathering, with the cumulative reviews… that the program is making a real difference just in terms of **boosting literacy levels** amongst those kids (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

Broadly, the holistic approach of this Evaluation found that cultural safety and a sense of belonging underpinned all student outcomes. The cultural competency of staff and the integration of culture into the classroom, cultural activities and visible displays are part of this. Above all, it includes relationships and support from Indigenous staff and role models, culturally safe spaces and the inclusion of other Elders and the Indigenous community. Furthermore, the cultural aspects of a student's school life need to be accessible when they need them, and not just an intermittent part of their experience.

[An Indigenous support worker is] something they [Indigenous students] are crying out for… Actually, having someone that's continuous with the [students] is really important, so that's one of my goals for the next phase of this project… (Knox Grammar School)

Consequently, this Evaluation found that student educational planning and the support provided needs to be holistic and personalised. It should encompass their academic needs and self-determined aspirations, their cultural identity and knowledge and all facets of their wellbeing. Support should also include engagement with Indigenous staff and directly with the student to privilege their voice in decision making. Support should be both ongoing and evolving throughout the school journey to ensure it is relevant and supportive of outcomes that will be sustainable in their post school life. As one of the staff mentioned:

They are all struggling… academically struggling… emotionally, sometimes with family, sometimes with friendships, sometimes with homesickness, the hard times… It's really important that we are here… [that] we're really listening to them when those moments erupt. (Canberra Grammar School)

4.2 Students are confidently engaged in their learning and Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes (Outcome 1)

4.2.1 Overview of Students' engagement in their learning and improvement of literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes

This Evaluation finds that the Project is successful in achieving outcome 1, which is the only predetermined outcome schools need to include in their three priority focus areas.

As shown in Table 3, schools showed a relatively consistent approach, both in terms of their high-level strategies and the specific activities they delivered. Many schools delivered multiple, intersecting activities to achieve improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes, with these often aligning to their additional two priority areas.

Interestingly, the focus groups indicated that the achievement of Outcome 1 is attributed to the cultural safety and sense of belonging felt by students and the wrap around supports that enable them to actively participate in academic life, such as those that enable their holistic wellbeing. The final report provides comprehensive detail on tailored academic support activities and associated outcomes as detailed in this section.

Students specifically referenced the support and guidance provided by Indigenous staff and other culturally focussed activities that develop their sense of confidence and generally improve their desire and motivation to engage in their learning. This echoes the qualitative inputs by school staff and suggests that the holistic support provided through the Project is just as valuable as those directly focussed on academic achievements.

It was cool because [name redacted, tutor] is Aboriginal and she gets what it's like – she has only just left. And she's smart and going to be a doctor so she knows what to do to get good marks. (Barker College - student)

I would just like to thank 1K and say that the programs [Student A] and [Student B] are involved in, has really helped them excel and I am very happy with their progress, they are enjoying reading and writing now and as their mum this makes me very happy and thankful. This year since being a part of the new program and [Student B]'s reading and writing has improved majorly since the beginning of 2021. The last few years they have struggled in this area of learning, but I have now noticed a huge confident boost, more comfort and happiness when they are given the task of reading and writing"- parent of two students benefiting from the Project (parent of two students at Taree Christian College)

Staff expressed the view that the Waratah project has increased their academic opportunities and assistance to target literacy and numeracy, for example, schools are able to purchase or develop additional learning materials and resources. This support increases the ability to tailor needs to the individual student and achieve greater consistency across their Indigenous student cohort.

The Waratah Project has opened up the opportunity to focus on literacy and numeracy… We've been able to double the assistance that these students are receiving… It's empowering them… It's being noticed in the classroom. (New England Girls' School)

Table 3 Strategies to support outcome 1 as outlined in final school reports

Strategy[12]	Activity	Distribution[13]
Tailored academic support (82)	Literacy and numeracy programs e.g. MultiLit, QuickSmart, Maths Pathways	23% (19)
	Baseline testing e.g. PAT Testing, NAPLAN	17% (14)
	Personalised Learning Plans	13% (11)
	Tutoring and academic mentoring (one on one, group and boarding tutors) e.g. recent graduate and school alumni tutors, Indigenous tutors and teaching assistant	12% (10)
	Learning support teachers (in classroom)	9% (8)
	Tailored learning resources	6% (5)
	After school learning in boarding and day school context e.g. homework centre, study groups by Indigenous or non-Indigenous tutors.	5% (4)
	Flexible curriculum	4% (3)

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[12] Strategies have been aggregated based on alignment across activities. Some activities overlap and have been categorised as per the most direct alignment

[13] References are not equal across schools, with schools providing detail on between one and seven individual activities

	Student engagement and feedback e.g. student surveys	4% (3)
	Speech and language assessment	2% (2)
	Indigenous curriculum content (literacy focussed)	4% (3)
Cultural safety and belonging (10)	Indigenous staff	80% (8)
	Learning resources (Indigenous content)	20% (2)
Holistic wellbeing support (4)	Relationships and regular communication with parents	75% (3)
	Health and wellbeing checks	25% (1)
Staff capacity-building(1)	Professional learning to build understanding of support the implementation of data and measurement activities	100%(1)

4.2.2 Strategy 1 Tailored academic support for supporting Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes

The tailored academic support initiative was referenced as the most prevalent strategy of the Project in improving literacy and academic outcomes, highlighting the need for schools to provide personalised approaches to literacy and numeracy support structures to enable student success and growth.

As shown in Table 3, schools have delivered a myriad of activities, the most cited being literacy and numeracy programs. However, the baseline testing and Personalised Learning Plans (PLP) are often those initially undertaken to identify a student's individual learning profile and aspirations and their current academic standing. This then enables schools to determine the most appropriate interventions and opportunities for each individual student, as well as undertaking ongoing monitoring to gauge their academic progress.

Literacy and numeracy programs

Nineteen schools delivered literacy and numeracy programs. Each school has a different program which caters for Individual student's needs and aspirations. Many schools reported that Indigenous student's literacy and numeracy capability have improved. There are a number of programs that schools used to improve literacy and numeracy and other academic outcomes, the most popular programs being MiniLit, MacqLit, InitiaLit, QuickSmart Numeracy and LNAP. The literacy and numeracy programs used by schools as methods to improve academic outcomes are listed below:

List of literacy and numeracy programs

MiniLit

MacqLit

InitiaLit

MultiLit

Wushka

Spell-it

QuickSmart literacy and numeracy

Maths Pathways

Dynamo Maths

Education Perfect

Reading Program

LNAP- Literacy Numeracy Action Plan screening

Soundwave spelling

Prime Mathematics

Spelling mastery

Rekenrek resources

MultiLit, MiniLit, Wushaka, MacqLit and Spell-it programs

Many schools use the MultiLit, MiniLit and MacqLit programs to improve literacy outcomes for students and have reported improvements in academic outcomes. Some schools utilise the Wushaka program in addition to these programs. The following are examples of schools that have facilitated programs which have improved student's academic outcomes, particularly those for Indigenous students requiring extra academic support:

Taree Christian College reported conducting PAT testing for students in Years 4, 5 and 6 which showed that for many students, results had improved. It is important to note that this cannot be solely attributed to the MultiLit, MinLi and Wushaka programs as Taree Christian College also used PLPs, both in class support and specialised classes.

Carinya Christian School also utilised MiniLit and MacqLit which were introduced from Years 1-6. These programs provide intervention in reading for any Indigenous students who are not meeting outcomes in reading. Students involved in the MiniLit Program during the duration of the Waratah Project all showed improvement (Carinya Christian School).

Some schools engaged the MacqLit program for students with low-literacy backgrounds and for EALD students. This program helped to support student transition into high school and helped with literacy development. One student who participated in the program stated that *"the program helped support him develop his literacy and better engage with his learning".* At a baseline level, the student started at the school with a reading rate of 49 words correct per minute, within three months of consistent Macqlit lessons, the student's reading rate improved to 63 correct words per minute" (Saint Ignatius College).

Some schools combined various different literacy and numeracy programs together depending on the student's levels and needs. One school combined LNAP practice, InitiaLit ,K-2, MiniLit and other forms of literacy and numeracy programs together to suit students individual needs. For example, Narromine

Christian school which combined various forms of literacy and numeracy programs, found that the Indigenous students steadily improved whilst the non-Indigenous students' growth flattened (Narromine Christian School). One school reported that student's attitude and engagement towards learning has changed after commencing their literacy programs, such as MacqLit (intervention program for struggling readers) and regular testing. They reported that their evidence of success was student engagement in their learning, increased attendance in class, completion of more tasks and more positive behaviour being displayed. One staff reported:

… students were provided with extra tutoring with the Learning Support Teacher with the focus on improving their reading and writing skills with the use of the MacqLit program and regular testing, students were able to demonstrate improvement in this area (New England Girl's School)

Some schools organised personal development training for staff to manage and use the programs effectively. Wellington Christian School utilises several literacy programs, including Seven Steps to Writing Success, InitiaLit and Spell-it in order to facilitate evidence-based teaching of phonics and spelling, the school provided staff training specifically in the Spell-it program. Tests were conducted prior to the program commencing and in Term 4 to assess student's knowledge of contractions, suffixes, prefixes and plurals. Most results improved across suffixes, prefixes and plurals.

Reading Program:

Three schools facilitated reading programs which contain a different component depending on the schools' interests and needs. Some schools utilised specific reading programs and in-class support to continue to build on these gains in academic outcomes. For Knox Grammar School 's reading program, the school purchased culturally appropriate books with Waratah funds which included traditional stories, language, art, history, cultural and leaders/heroes. Knox Library also focused on developing more indigenous literature and posting reviews of such collections to staff and students to promote broader reading of Indigenous texts. The reading program also included the use of new assessment programs supported by staff training and manuals. Unfortunately, this program went on hold during COVID lockdowns and restrictions. Feedback indicated a new confidence from the boys in the support offered.

The Program not only improved the boys' confidence, fluency and word power but also broadened the boys' cultural knowledge and rapport with support teachers who work with them in their day classes. Further, the support teachers also learnt about the boys' boarding context and interests and friendships. The aim was that the boys would learn to read with proficiency and then develop a creative story, based on their reading, to read to younger family members at home. The impact of the culturally appropriate books also led to greater cultural understanding by the teachers of each boy (Knox Grammar School).

Macleay Vocational College also use Reading program in a whole of school read-a-thon. They reported that they had 100% engagement of students participating in reading at some stage throughout the week.

Education Perfect and QuickSmart literacy and numeracy

Two schools identified that they use the QuickSmart literacy and numeracy program with one school incorporating the program with Education Perfect. Saint Ignatius College's First Nations Enrichment Teacher facilitates the QuickSmart literacy and numeracy program for students with identified needs in numeracy. When the QuickSmart program was running consistently, students were able to improve their numeracy skills (Saint Ignatius College).

Maths Pathways

Kempsey Adventist School utilises Maths Pathways particularly for Indigenous students with in-class support being provided to students by the Indigenous support worker. They reported that Maths Pathways allows students to work at their own level. Students were tested every two weeks to ascertain what they have mastered over the previous two weeks. They have seen a higher average growth in 2021 than during 2020 (2020 results were lower than expected, with the disruption of lockdown). *"Considering the disruptions,*

Dynamo Maths

Dynamo Maths identifies and supports pupils at risk of developmental dyscalculia and pupils who are performing significantly below their peers in Maths[14]. Narromine Christian School uses the numeracy program Dynamo Mathematics for numeracy intervention and additional streamed support in class.

Rekenrek resources, Multi attribute blocks (MAB) and Base 10

St Andrew's Cathedral School and the Gawura School utilise Rekenrek resources (hands on manipulatives) which aids students with their understanding of numeracy. Multi-attribute blocks (MAB) and Base 10 sets have also been used to demonstrate to students' relationships between units, tens, hundreds and thousands which enables students to visualise the concept of place value.

Indigenous Education Staff

Three schools reported they have Indigenous education staff to facilitate the literacy and numeracy programs. Scots College implement a literacy and numeracy program for students in Year 7 – 9 (which includes weekly and preparatory programs). The Indigenous Education Coordinator (who works with staff and the English department) gathered information and resources to target specific skills and areas in weekly preparatory sessions. The coordinator invested in "Lessons for teaching Literature" and "100 Great EFL Quizzes, Puzzles and Challenges", which informed proformas and scaffolds that were used to aid students understand literacy works, helping students improve their comprehension skills (Scots College).

Kempsey Adventist School also have an Indigenous support worker for their literacy and numeracy programs (see Maths Pathways). Students from Year 7 to 10 were involved in at least one literacy session focussing on a number of areas (depending on student needs) each week.

Improvement in NAPLAN **results**

In addition to Improvement of the academic outcomes stated above, there are some improvements in results in NAPLAN tests noted by some schools after commencing their literacy and numeracy programs. One school reported that NAPLAN results across Numeracy, Reading, Spelling and Writing are above State and like schools and demonstrated positive growth results which were greater than expected'(Gawura School).

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School stated that explicit literacy focused teaching and intervention has seen continued growth in student's phonological awareness, phonetic understanding, and decoding and encoding skills. This is evident in our NAPLAN results with most of the students across the school (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9) achieving at or above the national average in reading and writing.

Literacy and numeracy programs including MiniLit, InitiaLit, 'Seven Steps to Writing Success' for each class was facilitated by Namoi Valley Christian School with the school reporting improvements in writing ability in Years 3/4 and 5/6 students and also saw improvements in NAPLAN results for both Years 3 and 5 in every NAPLAN domain (note that data could be skewed by small class numbers and outliers). PM Reading Level tracking showed improvements for students with both staff and students from the school indicating that they enjoyed the change in the way they were teaching writing and felt confident in teaching and learning. (Namoi Valley Christian School).

Baseline testing

Fourteen schools reported baseline testing as a specialised assessment tool and strategy to support numeracy and literacy with other academic outcomes, so that they can trace student's progress and needs.

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[14] Dynamo maths n. d., viewed 18th February, https://dynamomaths.co.uk/

The popular assessments schools utilised were NAPLAN and Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT). There are other assessments facilitated by schools such as the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT), the York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC), the South Australian Spelling Test (SAST) Spelling and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills testing (DIBELS) and ESTA-L an early literacy screening platform. Many schools utilised various formats of assessments to measure student's growth, needs and efforts. Baseline testing is "essential assessment to capture data on students' literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge" (Macleay Vocational College). One staff member went on to complete the professional development course 'Growing Evidence Informed Practice' which assisted in helping to collate, analyse and present information on students individually and collectively. From this testing data, independent and small group intervention was implemented based on learning needs identified through the data (Macleay Vocational College)

Tracking of student assessments was conducted by Kinross Wolaroi School and the school provided support in areas where students may be struggling. This support allows for assistance on an as needed basis and allows for teachers to have extra support when required in class (Kinross Wolaroi School).

Regarding the baseline testing, one staff mentioned that:

..Testing results from our Indigenous kids is really useful because we need to get as much insight into [them] as we can… their strengths and their natural abilities and then [understand] what we need to build on those… (St Catherine's School)

NAPLAN and PAT testing, PM Benchmarking and DIBELS testing

NAPLAN, School Reports and Best Start Data were used to determine areas of strength and weakness for students and this data, matched with formative and summative assessment, has helped determine student progress (Carossy Anglican School).

PM Benchmarking was conducted by Wellington Christian School, which found that Indigenous student growth increased at a higher rate than non-Indigenous students across individual student growth and literacy for all Indigenous students across years 3, 4 ,5 and 6:

Many schools utilised a mixed assessment approach to measure student's academic needs and progress. The use of evidence to inform teaching practice is an effecting way to improve student learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy. DIBELS testing, NAPLAN, PAT testing were introduced by Carinya Christian School. The school reported that the Waratah project has enabled them to develop diagnostic assessment and the ability to respond to these results, with particular attention to the Indigenous students.

Impact of COVID -19 on academic achievement

COVID-19 impact was reported by some schools with the result that some Indigenous students did not demonstrate expected growth in 2021, This can be attributed to the disruption that Covid-19 caused to their learning.

"Our Aboriginal students faced significant challenges in maintaining continuity throughout the remote learning period, which lasted for 13 weeks" (Loreto Normanhurst)

Personalised Learning Plan (PLP)

Eleven schools referred to the Personalised Learning Plans (PLP) as a strategy to support student's academic outcomes in their final report. In regard to PLP, these ideally involve students and their families in goal setting and include regular meetings with teachers and support staff to discuss how students are tracking throughout the year. It is developed to provide a greater connection and purpose in the relationship between home and school.

Including parents and boarding staff in the development and feedback of the PLPs allowed for a more holistic support and opened dialogue regarding support for the girls. Having networks of support meant when learning moved online parents too were aware of where and how further support was available (Abbotsleigh)

Calrossy Anglican School reported that it is to establish targeted learning strategies and learning expectations and support for improved academic outcomes, specifically in literacy and numeracy.

Further, the PLP should be student lead as one staff described as follows:

Personalised learning plans ensured students take accountability for their own work and organisation (Report from Pymble Ladies' College).

Some school also reported that PLP allowed for the teachers to hear first-hand the areas the students would like to work on. Focus groups also highlighted the value of PLP, with one teacher glowing in their assessment of the impact these have, which leads student's growing a sense of joy in their learning. One staff described as follows:

It… allows me to take a detailed look at the pathway which I need to guide the students on within the classroom and… have an opportunity to create [that]. The kids are happy. I can see a sense of joy in their learning. They understand their learning intentions really well. They understand their direction in literacy and maths lessons. They feel confident in asking questions that relate to their learning intentions, and I can actually see a lot of productivity in my classroom over the last six months, which is really inspiring. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

Tutoring and academic mentoring (one on one, in small groups and within the boarding house)

All ten schools noted an improvement in academic outcomes through tutoring and mentoring

All ten schools noted an improvement in academic outcomes via tutoring and mentoring, as did the many schools that commented on these types of activities in focus groups. Students also echoed this sentiment with one providing feedback that:

The support from the tutors have put me to another level (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview – student).

Further, the Project has been pivotal in providing the funding to enable schools to engage additional staff, increase tutoring and mentoring opportunities which have resulted in positive feedback both from students and staff. For example, some schools mentioned that they employed teaching assistants to focus on working with individuals and small groups for further literacy instruction.

The comments from the TA and classroom teachers was that each of the students who were receiving the extra support were making noticeable progress (Namoi Valley Christian School) .

Students revealed the additional support that is provided both in the classroom and through other activities as invaluable:

…extra support has been great, particularly when we are withdrawn from class. It's been great to ask questions without feeling like I'm going to be judged by the rest of the class. [Redacted] will explain things in the way I can understand and take things back to the basics, which then builds up to what we are learning in class. I would like this to continue next year. (New England Girls' School – student)

However, conversely a student at one school provided feedback that while tutoring was sometimes available, often it's not when they needed it and suggested a more flexible tutoring system.

I think it's that one-on-one connection with the students that's helping… To have extra funding to do that individualised one-on-one sort of support… is fantastic… This could help really boost

Form of tutoring and mentoring

Different forms of tutoring and mentoring are reported depending on each school's situations and needs, this occurred one-on-one, in small groups and within the boarding house and/or school settings. The type of tutors also varied depending on the schools, some schools employed assisting teachers, some employing ex-school students whilst others employed Indigenous tutors. Loreto Normanhurst school reported that their students responded well to the additional support teacher, who worked with them on intensive literacy, numeracy and organisation support. The support was limited to a maximum of 2 students at a time. The teacher who provided these sessions noted that this was a more successful approach as students were more responsive in an intensive environment as opposed to in-class support (Loreto Normanhurst School).

Tutoring sessions in Boarding house:

Four schools reported that the tutoring sessions occurred in the boarding houses. The following are some examples of tutorial sessions in the boarding house settings.

Knox Grammar Students were also supported by the evening preparation tutors each night in boarding house with one-on-one intervention introduced when needed on a specific task or concept. Students also worked in groups on a task and collaboration helped normalise asking questions (Knox Grammar School).

Kinross Wolaroi school has preparation tutoring in their Boarding program which includes intensive English writing and reading courses delivered to Year 7-8 two nights per week. Having structured preparation sessions occurring five nights a week and run by qualified teaching staff allows for routines to be established and support provided where necessary.

Some schools have an Indigenous academic support teacher providing support for Indigenous students during the day and evenings at the boarding house.

Ex-students as tutors and mentors

Several schools engaged recent graduates and school alumni to act in tutor and mentor roles. One school reported an increase in the uptake of their tutoring program when led by graduate tutors, commenting that they felt it was because they were more relatable to current students and would be good role models for young students.

This approach was two-fold in that it provided role models for the students- inspiring them to look to future beyond school as well as providing numeracy and literacy support (Abbotsleigh)

One school reported that the areas of focus for learning are flagged by teachers or can be student led. It was reported that the tutoring program supported students with understanding task requirements, the completion of tasks, targeting specific skills or content and a general increase in academic confidence. Barker College where the tutoring program is implemented by ex-students revealed that:

At the conclusion of the year, students were surveyed regarding their experience of the tutoring program. Of 13 respondents (of a total of 15 students involved at the end of 2021), 7 (53%) increased their attendance rate to Wingaru sessions throughout the year. Ten of these students rated the experience as "very helpful" or "extremely helpful" (76%) (Barker College).

COVID-19 pandemic and school approaches towards tutoring

Tutorial patterns have also been impacted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with some schools needing to change the approaches from previous teaching and learning formats. One school reported that COVID health restrictions occurred when intervention was becoming more consistent and continued and prolonged impacts of restrictions saw staff shift the focus from intervention to engagement with school. Physical and mental wellbeing of students and their families became a priority for many schools in

response to the significant impact of health restrictions within the school and wider community. Certainly, COVID restrictions was challenging for schools, One staff described the situation as:

Covid restrictions has significantly impacted our ability to continue intervention with students. We will need to rethink how we approach intervention in 2022 so we can put appropriate supports in place for these students as they progress to Year 10 (Macleay Vocational College – Intervention Support Staff member comment).

However, one school kept one-on-one tutoring where possible for students using a local teacher (and a cultural mentor to support both their academic and wellbeing needs) during lock down. Others chose to use both online and face-to-face tutoring programs, so the school provided flexible learning options for students depending on their circumstances. One school reported that they have implemented an online, free, learning management website called **Studiosity** for all Indigenous students (Kinross Wolaroi School). This platform provides online support for all subject areas and can be accessed at all times including at home and after hours.

Learning support teachers (in classroom)

Eight schools reported that learning support teachers wored with students in classroom settings. Students were provided with learning support in numeracy and literacy in small group settings, one-on-one, or with in-class support in accordance with how students are progressing in class. In class support allows students to participate fully in classroom activities on the same basis as their peers. Furthermore, it was reported that in-class support helped direct future support and study patterns (Pymble Ladies' College)

Some schools reported to have increased their learning support teachers (*Narromine Christian School, Wellington Christian School*). Wellington Christian School reported employing a learning support coordinator to run intensive and small learning groups with class teachers. The hire of a Learning Support Coordinator allowed for greater capacity for teaching concepts in all ability groups. The positive impacts from a student survey conducted found that Maths became the student's favourite subject. Staff reported that:

One student who was known to abscond from the room during Maths lessons disclosed: "I really like the way you taught maths because it's fun working it out."(Wellington Christian School)

Student who struggled to work with friends and was timid about participating in maths classes: "I really liked the way you taught Maths and STEM because we learn to be in groups." Wellington Christian School)

Some school employ Indigenous Support Workers in a learning support role. Kinross Wolaroi School Indigenous Support Worker works alongside Learning Support to identify how to best support all Indigenous students. This approach allows students to access support in areas where they need further assistance. The school reported that that the role of Indigenous Support Worker has been instrumental in building student confidence and a safe learning environment in which the students can ask for assistance (Kinross Wolaroi School).

Tailored learning resources

Five schools reported using tailored learning resources as an effective strategy to support literacy and numeracy and other academic outcomes.

For example, literacy classes were implemented by Casino High School where students were placed in classes based on their ability, specific activities were developed to support student learning and build confidence in their literacy skills.

After school learning

Four schools listed after school learning as a strategy to support academic outcomes, where it occurs one-

on-one or groups in boarding houses and/or school settings by an Indigenous tutor or non-Indigenous tutor.

Namoi Valley Christian School has created a Homework centre (weekly) after school. Initially two supervisors were employed but a third was hired due to the popularity of the program. One staff reported that:

> *We were also pleasantly amazed at the number of students who participated in the homework centre; this led to an increase in the number of students who were completing their homework each week (Namoi Valley Christian School)*

Calrossy Anglican School engages afterschool tutoring and one-on-one support programs where tutors provide the Indigenous Coordinator with a progress report at the end of each term and identify areas of focus for the next term.

Flexible curriculum

Three schools reported the use of a flexible curriculum as a strategy to support outcome 1. Some schools also attempted to offer a flexible teaching environment to suit each student's individual needs.

One school has a Literacy and Learning Elective (L&L) which is designed to provide additional assistance in the development and consolidation of literacy skills for students with identified learning needs. The L&L elective comprises of smaller class sizes and individualised support which focuses on building skills required for other subjects. It was reported that student confidence levels increased due to smaller classroom size and individualised support; An example provided by the school from an L&L teacher was (Pymble Ladies' College):

> *"One lovely connection that [Year 10 student] made the other day was with the strengths of her cultural learning. For the last unit in L&L we have been doing visual analysis of texts. Initially [the student] felt at a disadvantage because she hadn't had the same background learning as her peers and wasn't aware of a lot of the technical vocabulary. Over the unit though she has recognised her own strength in this area, saying to me "I have realised that I am very good at analysis". I started to mention that her own cultural experience would be rich with interpreting meaning from visuals and she took over nodding and saying that it was very strong. We agreed that she had to learn some "school terms" to use in her analytical writing about visual texts but the skills were strongly developed and embedded through her cultural connections and experiences."(Pymble Ladies' College)*

Student engagement and feedback

Three schools reported student engagement and feedback (e.g. student survey) as a strategy to support Outcome 1. It was stated that surveys capture effectiveness of academic support (Canberra Grammar School)

Some schools revealed that the impact of more frequent parent interventions and engagement was highlighted during the lockdown. Although COVID 19 impacted on student learning and was a source of frustration in families for many reasons, it also gave the staff opportunities to contact, meet online and give feedback and support to parents about their son's learning, It not only enables teachers to moderate and agree on strategies that would work with the boy, but also with the follow up meeting with the boy who felt he chose his own learning and felt supported in the way he needed, rather than just email contact; this confidence has translated back to the classroom'(Knox Grammar School).

Speech and language assessment

St Joseph's Christian College engage a local Medical Centre through the 715 Scheme which involves appointments with speech pathologists, audiologists, dieticians etc. The appointments have led to a greater awareness of student's health and wellbeing needs which allows for staff to tailor support for each

student to ensure improvement in literacy.

The medical appointments however were not related to speech and language assessment, for example, medical appointments highlighted student anxiety around key academic assessment periods. Consequently, the school developed support to ensure student anxiety was minimised, organisation and preparation maximised and literacy and numeracy outcomes improved (St Joseph's Christian College).

Saint Ignatius' College have partnered with speech and language therapists who conduct sessions with students which focus on targeted language and literary components from language assessment including work on vocabulary, comprehension, written expression and inferencing. Final reports indicate the positive benefit and outcomes that students are eager to engage in speech pathology sessions which has led to ongoing improvements in literacy and language skills. Students involved with speech pathology sessions are able to implement auditory and reading comprehension strategies which contributes to their overall comprehension of information (Saint Ignatius' College)..

Indigenous curriculum content (literacy focussed)

Four schools listed Indigenous cuticulum content (literacy focused) as a strategy to support outcome 1.

Some schools purchased Wellington quality literature including literature by Indigenous authors and Indigenous themes and stories which are incorporated as class study texts and library books.

Narromine Christian College purchased books and library resources to support connection to culture.

Progress and challenges on student's academic outcomes via tailored academic support

Specific student's academic outcomes

Overall, the tailored academic support facilitated through the Project is bearing fruit in numerous ways, the most common outcomes being an increase in student confidence and commitment to learning. Some of the specific student outcomes noted across final reports and focus groups include:

- Enhanced ability to incorporate technical vocabulary in writing and critically review/evaluate a text, through both an academic and personal perspective, *their individual voices are coming out with greater strength. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

- Significant improvements in the comprehension of complex English texts and increased ability to express ideas across various genres.

- Removing the fear of Maths, which in one school was attributed to an additional three teachers and a trained SLSO during Maths lessons, providing the capacity to teach specific concepts in ability groups. One staff explicated as follows:

What was once the most hated and dreaded time of the week, Maths quickly became the students' favourite learning time, even overtaking Sport in a recent class survey. (Wellington Christian School)

- Increase in library borrowing, particularly by students, a staff member stated:

…who hadn't borrowed much before… there's a snowball effect in the right direction and engagement because of confidence… They want to have a go… I often see Indigenous… children run up and say, "I did this or I read this" … It's heart-warming and not ending with reading. Writing is now becoming something that they want to have a go at and they're not reluctant to do it. So that is a really big step for a lot of these kids. (Wellington Christian School)

Challenges through the Covid-19 pandemic

However, some schools did note that regardless of efforts undertaken through the Project, literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes were yet to be achieved or were challenging to measure due to the impacts of COVID-19. For example, one school reported a noticeable drop in reading fluency after the lockdown, from which some students did not recover quickly. Though they also noted that even with the slight regression in fluency, the overall progress of students was still outstanding and in fact significantly higher than non-Indigenous students who participated in similar programs. Two others commented that learning from home prevented them from accurately tracking student results. Another school reported that their students were continuing to work towards stage appropriate outcomes, but their actual level of growth cannot be ascertained until students engage in their next NAPLAN assessments.

4.2.3 Strategy 2 Cultural safety and belonging for supporting Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes

The Project's emphasis on fostering an environment of cultural safety and belonging has been a key factor in helping Indigenous students to engage in their learning more confidently. Many schools recognised that creating this environment results in students who genuinely want and are often even excited to come to school. In addition to the activities outlined in the final reports, focus groups with both staff and students highlighted the importance of Indigenous curriculum content and referenced peer support. All of which are seen as having significant knock-on effects to students' academic outcomes and the achievement of outcome 1.

> *By making a student feel safe and giving them a sense of belonging, I can help enormously… in terms of them being able to engage effectively as learners in the school community. And so, I think the recognition of the culture and the celebration of it has actually… meant that these kids are willing to engage; engage in learning or engage in a different way than they might have done previously. (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

Importance of integrating Indigenous staffs and safe spaces

The most prevalent aspect to creating a culturally safe learning environment is having Indigenous members of staff and safe spaces. These staff, whether they be teaching, or non-teaching, were seen as bringing a high degree of skill in providing students with appropriate cultural support and acting as a cultural mentor within an academic context. Their roles are credited to increasing the confidence and resilience of students and establishing their sense of purpose, which ultimately increases their engagement in a learning environment.

Attesting to the difference this makes, one teacher commented on a particular student who *in the last two years [redacted] has gone in leaps and bounds because she feels supported. Her mum's been brought in on occasion. They've been able to have discussions with [redacted]… Her entire academic progress, her behaviour in class, everything has turned around in the last two years. (Calrossy Anglican School)*

Most importantly students themselves expressed the importance of Indigenous staff, specifically referencing the support they receive in a classroom environment. This is seemingly the result of the inherent safety Indigenous staff create, as well as an approach that students experience as less threatening. All four schools whose students participated in a focus group had Indigenous staff members, either teaching or non-teaching, and in each of these discussions, students could not have spoken more highly of their role and the support they provide. One student addressed this clearly:

> *I like having [redacted] in the classroom because sometimes I don't like asking the teachers stuff and it's easy to ask [redacted]. (Kinross Wolaroi School – student)*

Overall, students were more responsive to Indigenous staff compared to other types of in-class support and provided various examples of outcomes. In one final report the school specifically attributed the marked improvement in all targeted academic areas as a result of increased days for their Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer, funded through the Project. This was also evidenced in focus groups with students, in which they individually and collectively showed incredible gratitude, appreciation and affection for Indigenous staff. This proved from the student's remarks as follows:

I hope that everyone can have a Miss [name redacted] and a Miss [name redacted] just that constant support system. (Pymble Ladies' College - student)

Boarding staff and Miss [name redacted] provide support and comfort. They provide a safe space to talk. (Pymble Ladies' College - student)

I appreciate all the things you help me with. Even though you are busy you always find a way to help. You helped me so much with online learning and I am so thankful for that." (Pymble Ladies' College - student)

[when asked if they like receiving extra support from the Indigenous Support Teacher] It's good. Mrs [name redacted] helps with any word that I am stuck on… I feel more support with her and feel better when I am around her. (Kempsey Adventist School – student)

'cause I feel more comfortable with [name redacted. Indigenous support worker]. (Kempsey Adventist School – student)

Including Indigenous contents in the learning resources

Further, the integration of Indigenous content into the curriculum was observed as a factor in increasing student engagement and in turn improved academic outcomes. This included providing opportunities for students to study Indigenous specific subjects such as culture, language, and environmental studies, as well as weaving Indigenous content into traditional subjects. Several senior students at one school specifically referenced their legal studies subject, commenting that it: *it helps us to learn about the impact of the legal system on Indigenous people (Kinross Wolaroi School – student).*

Another example was an English subject, in which several students from one school read a play by an Indigenous playwright. These students reflected on the value of incorporating culture into subjects and were enthusiastic about the different opportunities to learn.

It is also of value to note that Indigenous curriculum content is generally an initiative led by Indigenous staff either directly, or through providing support, guidance, and cultural content to other staff members.

More intentional use of resources that have Indigenous perspectives in class… validates that sense of belonging. And the kids are more likely to show a sense of pride or say something. I remember doing a poem in English that was completely in language, and one of the students who had been quite quiet, I think you could see the smile and she was explaining it to students around her… The more embedding that we have… that pride and belonging comes out. (Pymble Ladies' College)

Peer support

Lastly, student's greater engagement in learning was seen to be dependent on peer support. Even if not always an intentional outcome of cultural programming in schools, the simple fact of bringing Indigenous students together as peers generates significant benefits.

Working in a group with the tutor, or working and learning from each other, I think that's enhanced [their confidence in their learning] … We wouldn't have had that in the past because often the boys felt that they wouldn't be good enough. And now all of a sudden there's a whole idea that they can learn from each other and feel quite proud that they can ask questions. (Knox Grammar School)

4.2.4 Strategy 3 Holistic wellbeing support for supporting Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes

Rather than focussing on Indigenous students' academic performance in isolation, the Project recognises that improved academic outcomes are often contingent on enhanced capabilities and wellbeing both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, student's social, emotional and physical wellbeing are important to the academic success.

> *We've been able to support their wellbeing, and I think that's really fostered and led to this higher engagement in the classroom too. I think kids do feel better about themselves. They're more likely and willing to learn…(Taree Christian College)*

Holistic wellbeing support can take a number of forms including personalised one-on-one support, counselling, mentoring programs with older students and dedicated wellbeing initiatives, ranging from breakfast and after-school clubs to positive psychology programs. The kind of cultural support discussed in the previous section is certainly an aspect of this, and Project funding has been pivotal to helping many of these initiatives get off the ground.

While holistic wellbeing focused activities support the achievement of Outcome 1, they are also an anticipated outcome in their own right, further detail is provided under Outcome 5.

4.2.5 Strategy 4 Staff capacity-building on cultural competence for supporting Literacy and Numeracy and other academic outcomes

While only directly referenced once in the final reports, the staff capacity building program is shown in the case study of *Macleay Vocational College* below, focus groups found that staff capacity building was the final contributing strategy to achieving Outcome 1. While training is covered in more detail under Outcome 8, it can be said that building the cultural competency of teachers assists them to understand the complexities and diversity of Indigenous students and their lives, in turn ensuring that academic supports are appropriate for student needs. Some teachers commented that understanding more about culture and Country further enhanced their awareness and empathy for the stress that a student may experience in a learning environment, particularly when they are away from family and community. One staff mentioned as follows:

> *Thinking about cultural capital… developing the capacity to understand and therefore have empathy and therefore teach something a bit better… We've never seen the kids so engaged… That's been quite substantial… Staff developing that confidence to teach a particular perspective or engage Indigenous kids… can only get better… I want to spend a couple more years really getting that skill up, developing my cultural capital. (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

Trauma-informed practice and the importance of understanding the impact of intergenerational trauma on a student's capacity to engage in their learning was cited numerous times. Schools recognised the need for both formal training, as well as the value that relationships with families, communities and Elders have in increasing their understanding of Indigenous issues, and those related to each student.

> *All of our staff attended the… online course on trauma in the classroom. And so that helped us have an even greater understanding of our students who come to school with trauma, but also how to help those students navigate that trauma within the school environment… It also allowed us to have discussions and to reflect on how that intergenerational trauma is ongoing and has an ongoing effect on our communities. But it also allowed me as an educator to take a look at where are we dealing with the trauma… and being able to recognise [it] in the children… and these are the steps that I can take to be able to address that in a safe manner… (St Andrew's Cathedral School)*

Case study – outcome 1 Improving literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes (Macleay Vocational College) Activities:

This school undertook a considered approach to **achieving the improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes of students.** This was both a top-down approach by leadership and internal facing strategies, as well as programs and activities that engaged students in their learning.

I read the most books during the week and won a prize for it. I'm okay at reading and I don't like to read out loud in front of the class but because I was trying to win, I read by myself and to people. I really liked one of the picture books that only had a few words, and the pictures told the story. I liked that when my friends and I looked at the pictures we all saw different things and thought it meant different things (student)I

Data and measurement: In 2021 the school had no formalised or consistent method of assessing and tracking student knowledge and student's literacy and numeracy skills. They underwent a considered approach to finding a tool that was appropriate for the school context, and eventually decided on 'Essential Assessment'. Once in place, they conducted a 'diagnostic assessment' of student's initially focussing on the Year 9 cohort and then including Year 10. Testing provided consistent data that measured students individually and collectively and allowed for the analysis of concerning information. It also enabled the school to map students according to the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions, which when initially rolled out revealed that grouping students for intervention according to their existing skill sets would be beneficial teaching students' foundational knowledge and skills for their continued growth in both literacy and numeracy

Staff capacity building: Formal professional learning was provided to one staff member on "Growing Evidence Informed Practice". The goal was to build staff understanding of support and the implementation of data and measurement activities. For example, the best ways to gather and use data and how it can inform classroom and whole school teaching and learning, as well as support targeted student interventions. In addition, an Indigenous staff member was supported to attain further education, which both built their own skills and capacity to participate better in a classroom environment but also enabled them to work with students with complex learning needs and promote cultural safety.

Additional support staff: In Semester 2 of 2021, school leadership assessed the use and allocation of support staff and reallocated them to achieve consistent student support. They also focussed on upskilling staff with the skills necessary for the class they were in. The result was greater stability for students by knowing in what class to expect support, and by who. This also meant the school could provide individual and small group intervention, which was targeted at students with similar learning needs and areas of development. Information generated through these interventions was also provided back to classroom teachers to create a consistent and responsive approach.

Aspirations for ongoing education and future careers: Utilising a Project led template for student post school aspirations, staff facilitated sessions where students identified areas of interest, strengths, and goals. Students were prompted to expand their thinking around what was possible. While, some students found these sessions challenging, they were well supported by staff and there were rich discussions that resulted in clear goals that will be incorporated into learning plans in 2022.

A Whole of school approach and commitment to literacy: The schools ran a Read-a-thon to invigorate and engage students in reading. It ran for one week and every subject area facilitated independent, guided, or whole class reading opportunities. The school purchased books with an Indigenous perspective, or by an Indigenous author. Students and staff recorded their participation in reading with incentives for the top readers in each year group, and staff members who read the most.

The school reported that this was an uplifting experience with all students engaging in reading opportunities across a range of subject areas and with a wide variety of staff members. The Read-a-thon achieved 100% of students participating in reading at some stage throughout the week.

4.3 Students experience a positive and successful transition into the School and Boarding environment (Outcome 2)

Three schools listed Outcome 2 as a priority area in their final school reports, with many others commenting on the transition of students in focus groups and Project meetings. The activities listed in reports mirrored those discussed, showing that the most common strategies to supporting this outcome related to:

- Relationship-building with students and their families
- Cultural safety and belonging
- Targeted and individualised learning support

4.3.1 Relationship-building with students and their families

The Waratah Project has emphasised to school staff the importance of getting to know Indigenous students holistically, particularly in terms of their cultural and familial contexts. Even before students officially commence their enrolments, many Waratah schools have instituted a practice of *building those connections, that familiarity (Barker College)* by reaching out to students and their families and developing relationships of trust and understanding from the outset through phone calls, as well as family and community visits.

> *We go and visit their communities with the support of the Waratah Project. So, we're able to meet the families first and foremost in their homes… in their communities, and that allows us to commence a relationship that's positive and culturally safe for the families before they even come to the school for an interview, or their application is complete. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill).*

Moreover, proactive relationship-building with students and their families is seen to assist in:

- Allaying the concerns of parents, who are reassured that their children are *going to a place where it will enhance their culture rather than lose it. (Knox Grammar School)*

- Comforting families in their decision making, particularly where the student has to leave home to attend boarding school, with one school commenting that the *additional funding to support staff members going out to community to support students and their parents coming into school and staying has… made the families feel more comfortable with the decision they make about sending their child away to school and out of community context in order to further their life, by having that connection with us from the start. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

- Helping students to feel less daunted and more welcome on their first day, thereby smoothing the transition into this new chapter of their lives.

- Empowering students to *be more confident in expressing their culture and… identity. (Knox Grammar School)*

This kind of relationship-building also helps enhance the capacity of staff members to better support Indigenous students as there is both a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for their needs and aspirations, home environments and how they practice and celebrate culture. A staff member expressed that:

> *We know a lot more about the Indigenous boys now, and I think part of that is… that we visit them in their context. We visit them in their community. We see the links; we see the networks. We see the*

people that are important in their lives with family and extended family. And that's helped us
understand the boys and to be able to help them settle. (Knox Grammar School)

While the Project has made great strides in enhancing relationships as a means of supporting student's transition, schools noted several activities where efforts should continue, or further development is required. This includes establishing relationships with families leading-up to their children starting at their new school, maintaining ongoing communication, and ensuring that parents are kept in the loop about issues that their children are having in school and boarding.

4.3.2 Cultural safety and belonging

The cultural safety and belonging that students' experience is one of the key determinants to a positive transition into their school and boarding environment.

The abovementioned relationship-building efforts are certainly one way to enhance this, as is the visual representation of culture as a way of schools expressing its importance, both of which are seen as supporting students and their families to feel safe and connected from the interview process onwards.

Prior to the Waratah Project, our enrolment process was quite basic… Since the Waratah Project, I think the families see a far more extensive cultural safety aspect to the college. They're able to come into the school and identify a number of different aspects of Aboriginal culture around the place… So that allows the families to feel safe and connected from the moment they arrive at the college and commence their interview process. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)

Cultural celebrations, activities and learning programs

Providing students with the opportunities to participate in cultural celebrations, activities and learning programs makes a demonstrable difference in the safety and belonging of new students. One school specifically reflected on the change they had observed in just 12 months, commenting that the ability for student's to be a part of events that represent their culture, rather just white or Western-culture and being provided opportunities to hear *…stories about their culture, about their past and some of their traditions (Narromine Christian School),* makes a big impact on a new student's transition.

Another example of how this occurs in practice is a Phase 2 Waratah school that runs a weekly cultural workshop for Indigenous students, which is seen by one of their Indigenous staff as *a crucial part of [students] successful transition and forming of identity… [an]… important part of building cultural knowledge, but also a crucial social aspect as [students] gather together and draw strength from each other (Canberra Grammar School).*

Important roles of Indigenous staff members for a culturally safe transition

Indigenous staff members, both teaching and non-teaching were seen as hugely important to enable a culturally safe transition and providing appropriate support for students and particularly so in a boarding environment. This included having a designated Indigenous boarding leader/staff member. As expressed by one Indigenous support worker: *It's really good… for me just to talk to them about things; for the girls to be able to talk to someone who actually understood where they were coming from. So, I think it's helped them through some of those tough times (Abbotsleigh),* her sentiment was echoed by a non-Indigenous colleague that felt their role *made a huge difference to the Indigenous girls. She's someone they could look up to, someone they could relate to on a different level, because the other [non-Indigenous] girls just don't really understand what the experience is. Boarding in itself is challenging, and then for the Indigenous girls, it's a whole other layer on top of that (Abbotsleigh).*

In addition to the support provided to students, Indigenous staff also played a valuable role in providing cultural training to non-Indigenous staff, ensuring they are well equipped to support students, as well as providing a cultural lens to ensure schools can create effective and safe transition plans.

Mentoring program for Indigenous students

Lastly, some schools also shared that having older Indigenous students play a mentoring role to their

younger counterparts proved beneficial. Even if the relationship was informal and not through any initiative specifically funded through the Waratah Project, the mentoring was seen as supportive of both safety and a sense of belonging during transition.

4.3.3 Targeted and individualised learning support

Academic assessment for successful transition to the boarding school

The provision of appropriate academic support measures, most importantly testing before they commence in a new school and tutoring during the early phase of their journey, is the final element of enabling a positive and successful transition to school and boarding. These support measures are also seen as more effective when allied with activities to create cultural safety and belonging. One school reported that testing as part of their enrolment process meant they were able to be more proactive in terms of a student's individual learning requirements, ensuring *they don't start on the back foot in terms of the academic side of things....* They also commented that *being on top of learning needs means that the transition is a lot smoother rather than waiting [for students] to fail (Kinross Wolaroi School).*

Tutoring programs funded through the project

Schools also highlighted a range of ways that tutoring programs funded through the Project assist Indigenous students with their transition. For example, it helps students academically to *catch up or even exceed and excel* in particular areas *where they might have been slightly behind,* which can often make students *feel different to other students (Kinross Wolaroi School).* These programs were also attributed to creating a sense of belonging through providing students with *'another group of kids to hang out with... to form another close-knit network with' (Barker College),* which in turn enhances academic engagement.

Notwithstanding the activities currently in place across many of the schools, focussing on getting to know students from the outset and the early collection of information on their cultural background, in addition to testing of their academic needs, was still seen as a gap. It was suggested by some schools that this approach facilitated a holistic understanding of each student, which in turn enhanced the support they can provide during their transition.

> *I think one of the hardest parts for a lot of the young boys coming through, particularly coming out of certain communities, is being away from obviously family and friends... It's just a little bit tricky to sort of get the dynamic of each [new] student from such a short meeting process [during their initial intake] ... Having a longer opportunity to actually make and, I guess, allow the boys to be more comfortable with staff and the college in general would probably be the best way to allow them to transition into the boarding and academic life... (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)*

4.4 Students have increased aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities (Outcome 3)

4.4.1 Role of the school with holistic approach to the student's future opportunities

Overview

Two schools prioritised outcome 3 and provided commentary in their final reports, with numerous others providing a view on the change they are seeing in their students as a direct result of activities delivered through the Project. Personalised guidance and the development of students' capacity and confidence to

navigate life post school was the key driver to achieving this outcome. As with many of the other outcomes, cultural safety and a sense of belonging, and holistic wellbeing support were also contributing factors.

> *I have a current student who's engaged and is so passionate about pursuing her future that she's already engaging on forums and things like that… so that she has the best knowledge about the options that she has for her future, which I haven't seen before. There's a real positive momentum towards looking towards the future… The focus has changed about the future, and it's not the immediate future, it's the long-term future… It's really lovely to have those dialogues and those conversations… The conversation has gone to, "Well, what am I going to do when I finish school that I can use to help my community?" And I think that's very much a positive progress [and] I think their mindset is also changing. The girls are thinking less about the fact that finishing school is the goal and that the future is to keep learning and that what they have to learn and what they have to offer is going to be of value for the future, whether it's for them or their community… So, there is that much more open mindset, rather than "I just have to get through school", which I think is definitely because of the Project itself… (Pymble Ladies' College)*

Importance of Indigenous specific opportunities and options

Broadly, this Evaluation finds there has been progress towards this outcome in schools where efforts are directly focused. However, students at one school who participated in a focus group reported that activities to support students with their goals and post school opportunities required further development.

Students at this school collectively felt that they "*know stuff, but not enough to make [an informed] decision" (Kinross Wolaroi School).* For example, some commented that they had participated in sessions with the careers advisor but that they didn't receive information on Indigenous specific opportunities and options, they also noted that generally this information wasn't communicated well by the school. All participating students reported their intent to attend university, but most students weren't aware of the opportunities for them as Indigenous students. Two students who had obtained early entry into university through an Indigenous pathway, learnt about this offering through their older peers. Outcome 3 is not a priority area for this particular school; hence their efforts have been directed elsewhere. As such, the perspective of these students is important to understand as a lesson, rather than a lack of achievement towards the Project's intended outcomes.

> *It's always been [about] protecting them and their wellbeing and their cultural safety comes first…*
> *(Knox Grammar School)*

4.4.2 Personalised guidance and development

Approach to personalised guidance and development

Personalised guidance with respect to ongoing education and future career options has evidently played a big role in helping to increase aspirations among Indigenous students. Ongoing conversations about future possibilities, long-term goals, what needs to be done and what barriers might need to be overcome to achieve them are all part of the personalised guidance that students are receiving as part of the Project. One staff revealed how the small groups setting and one on one tutoring assisted students in being able to talk about their future opportunities:

> *What I love about the Waratah Project is in this small group setting and even one-on-one tutoring, you have those opportunities to have conversations where they do talk about their aspirations for later in life. And just two weeks ago, a student was already talking about what she's going to do at university. So, you know, the fact that they're having goals… we're thinking beyond secondary and pushing those goals further, which is fantastic. (New England Girls' School)*

The specific approach to providing personalised guidance and development as outlined by the two schools in their final reports appeared a sequential process, commencing with understanding a student's individual

needs and aspirations and identifying appropriate goals, then progressing to activities that enable them to better navigate their post-school life. The process includes open and ongoing communication with students and opportunities that foster their interests and develop their skills. Flexibility in this process was also seen as important as student's goals often changed as they gained exposure to different careers and pathway options.

Figure 2   Process to providing personalised guidance and development

Identifying aspirations and goal setting
- Starting the discussion on aspirations and goals with students during their initial interview
- Opportunities to engage with careers advisor and mentors
- Identifying goals and barriers
- Developing a career plan and materials, such as a resume and/or personal statement

Capacity building and exposure
- Opportunities to attend school led and external career information sessions, workshops and university open days
- Access to training and skills development (focussed on their career on further education e.g., leadership)
- Opportunities to participate in specialised summer and winter schools

Putting goals into practice
- Assistance with university and scholarship applications
- Opportunities to undertake traineeships and internships
- Partnerships with CareerTrackers (and other pathway programs)
- Assistance with accessing ABSTUDY and accommodation support.

Vocational program, partnership with university, and other opportunities

A part of this approach was providing students with opportunities to participate in work experience placements and various forms of traineeship, apprenticeship, and cadetship programs that students are able to engage in while still at school. These activities were seen as highly valuable by teachers.

By them having to learn the responsibility… to show up each week for their shift, that will carry on throughout as well… I think for some of them in the beginning, it starts off as an incentive that you will get paid for the work that you're doing, but then they begin to take pride and really enjoy what they've done… and then… their confidence in learning in school and… in talking to people will look completely different… The ability and the confidence in that will help them once they finish school. (Pymble Ladies' College)

It is important to note that the vocational programs and other opportunities provided to students very much depend on ongoing partnerships between schools, employers and other organisations that are responsible for their delivery. Some schools have also developed external partnerships with universities to help create education and employment pathways for Indigenous HSC/secondary graduates, noting that where these exist there is a clear shift in student's aspirations for their future. Early entry into university, that is often an outcome of these partnerships was also seen as a way of increasing a student's confidence and keeping them engaged during their final year.

Community partnerships for any student moving on from school is fundamental… If we reflect on last year's graduates… and who were most successful… the ones who… engaged in external partnerships were the strongest; were the ones who were most empowered. (Loreto Normanhurst)

Further, an increase in the cultural competency of staff, developed through the Project, has enhanced their appreciation of the challenges faced by students, and in turn supports a more holistic view on career

planning. It was also noted by several schools that the ability of educators to expand a student's sense of possibilities and to empower them to take ownership of their future is very much a part of developing a student's confidence. Interestingly, one school reflected on the need for better educating staff on self-determination, questioning how activities relating to outcome 3, such as career planning and goal setting, could be better delivered through a culturally appropriate lens.

4.4.3 Holistic wellbeing support

When it comes to holistic wellbeing support, schools are intentional about how they build students' social and emotional capabilities, including in relation to future career aspirations. Such capabilities include leadership, self-initiative and motivation, confidence and self-worth, and a sense of purpose. The development of these skills is optimally part of the process outlined above but can also occur discreetly. For schools who have activities in place, regardless of their priority focus area, staff noted a shift in student's mindset, for example students openly asking, "what they could achieve in life" and challenging the impacts of colonisation such as intergenerational unemployment, that may have affected their families or community. One school reported a noticeable shift in students' mindsets over the 12-month period, commenting that due to their efforts they were now seeing students 'evaluating themselves on their progress, exploring the different requirements aligned to their goals, and determining if and how they can improve, or if those goals need to shift or change. There was also evidence that how post-school aspirations belonged in student support and engagement structures even before the commencement of secondary education. One staff sated as following:

I've seen a few of the kids become more confident… They're putting their hands up for things that they haven't done before, even being leaders and representing our school… So that's got a lot to do with that conversation that's happening on a regular basis with encouragement and building them up… Even just what seems like really small steps in confidence-building, you see them start to dream big dreams. So, you can imagine the snowball effect that continues over years… They're like, "I want to be a doctor. I can do this". And if that's built on over the years, then, you know, those dreams would be more possible. (Wellington Christian School)

4.4.4 Cultural safety and a sense of belonging

Lastly, but often the underpinning element, is the cultural safety and belonging, which is seen to increase aspirations by way of cultural mentors and role models. For starters, Indigenous staff members themselves serve as mentors and role models to Indigenous students, as do external mentors that are engaged to inspire students and demonstrate to them what might be possible in their own lives.

In this same vein, some schools bring in former students to serve as role models for their younger counterparts, which was seen as powerful in guiding students through various challenges and providing a first-hand view on what post-school life might be like. It was also noted that former students often have experienced a less than linear path to university or their career and can provide current students with an understanding that there are many pathways to success.

We have used Waratah Project resources to have community members coming in and teaching the girls and showing them, you know, what they're doing with their lives and what the possibilities are out there and actually showing them that just because they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls that they can also be these amazing things. (Loreto Normanhurst)

…having [Indigenous staff] in prominent positions [has] enabled our Indigenous students to see that school is for them as well. It's for everybody. So just having them there, they're relating to students that we've not been able to reach before. So, they're relating on a different level. [Redacted] sharing her experiences with the students and saying sort of, yes, "I felt exactly the same way, and this is

4.5 Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage (Outcomes 4)

4.5.1 Strengthening connection to and respect and pride in Indigenous culture

Eleven of the 25 schools include Outcome 4 as one of their priority areas, and this Evaluation finds there has been a marked shift in recent years in terms of the strengthened connection with and pride in culture and heritage experienced by students. This is broadly the case for all participating schools, even those that prioritise other focus areas, as activities within a holistic approach always include some element of culture. Hence, progress towards this outcome can be attributed to the very deliberate effort by schools to cultivate and prioritise an environment that deeply understands, respects, and celebrates culture.

There's obviously a level of safety within the school where students just feel, I guess, inherently safe to share about culture and experience… or to express their identity… There is that level of safety that just allows them to do that in a really organic way… [There's] a proactive approach by other staff, non-Indigenous staff, teachers and the like, to engage with culture or, you know, embedding culture into the classroom and curriculum. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

A big part of creating this environment is valuing, validating, and honouring individual students and their cultural identities.

At past schools they haven't gone out of the way to acknowledge that we are Indigenous, [here they do and] it makes us feel more confident and prouder in our culture. (Pymble Ladies' College – student)

Another part of it is the increased visibility and normalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within the school environment, whether through the previously mentioned Indigenous library resources and Indigenous curriculum content, or occasions where Indigenous culture can be accessed, showcased, or celebrated. Lastly, and as outlined in previous sections, Indigenous staff and peers play a valuable role in achieving this outcome.

To me, the major benefit of the Project is knowing the students that are in the project. They are given an opportunity to engage in various activities that are in addition to mainstream learning, which I think is a very good thing. It's great that we see an indigenous student opening our assemblies… We can then identify that person as having an [individual] Indigenous identity that is relevant to our school and the context of our learning. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)

Importantly, increased cultural pride is commonly accompanied by a decrease in cultural shame, or *getting rid of that shame factor (Casino High School)*. Staff across several schools noted that more and more, students are expressing a pride in being Indigenous, where before they might have not even publicly identified as such.

For example, one school reflected on students that had previously been reluctant or reticent to express culture and/or their cultural identity, commenting that student's *sort of tiptoed around it (Sydney Church of*

England Grammar School). Whereas this has drastically changed due to activities delivered through the Project. A staff member from another school noted *the beauty is the knock-on effect (Canberra Grammar School),* which in this instance was initially an increase in pride felt by students, which resulted in increased confidence and engagement in all other aspects of their schooling.

One of the positives… have been that we no longer have any kids who are… choosing not to openly identify… That's a very big change from when I started in this role four years ago… It helps build awareness throughout the rest of the school population, but also it just clearly shows that they know it's not something that they're hiding away from… that it's something that they're proud about… They don't seem embarrassed or seem like they feel like they need to hide that, which is a good thing. (Barker College)

I can see the personal change in some of our Indigenous kids… 'Cause I feel like I do know Aboriginal students from the community and some of them, there might have been a little bit of embarrassment, some of that shame culture. Just because of our approach with our Project and all

Case study – unique initiative (Narromine Christian School)

There are many standout initiatives across the 25 schools. A particularly unique example is where Project funding was used to create professionally filmed videos to showcase a school's cultural activities, such as the painting of a mural that depicts local stories and involved students in the design and painting. These videos are featured on Storylines, a platform that shares and celebrates Aboriginal stories of history, culture, and achievement. The school sought approval from the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, who were reportedly impressed with the school's efforts. Hence, this activity supports an increase in student pride, cultural competency of the broader school and relationships with families and community.

Figure 3 Co-constructed mural (Narromine Christian School)

4.5.2 Learning and the celebration of culture

Many of the activities that relate to cultural learning and celebration are similar across schools, though often contextualised and reflective of their local Indigenous communities and the diversity of the First Nations that their students represent. These activities were widely reported by staff to play a crucial role in helping students to feel greater cultural pride, since it gives them an opportunity to share their culture and feel validated that the school and their peers are celebrating and learning with them. Examples of celebration of culture are displayed in Figure 4.

[Redacted] was dancing the other day at the assembly and I just saw the pride in his face. You know, I know him quite well and the look on his face was just "I own this. This is me and I belong here". And you know, I was shedding a tear because I just thought how proud he must be of representing his culture to the rest of the school… (Knox Grammar School)

Figure 4   Indigenous dance (Kempsey Adventist School)

- Welcome to, and Acknowledgement of Country at assemblies and other school events.

- Dedicated Indigenous cultural events and celebrations.

- The use of art and other visual displays of culture, and activities for students and teachers to learn about different artist mediums and their cultural uses e.g., use of AIATSIS Map in common areas, murals, use of natural painting materials in art classes, weaving club.

- Excursions that provide students with opportunities to engage with their own or other communities, Elders and walk Country.

- Yarning Circles, both those that are permanent physical features within school sites, or as a way of facilitating discussions with students (including their non-Indigenous peers) families, staff and Elders and other community representatives.

- Language classes, particularly where they are accessible to all students, and other uses of language such as in Acknowledgements, signposting, in the design of meeting rooms and activities such as "word of the week".

- Dancing, both classes and performances and the use of Indigenous instruments e.g., Didgeridoo and clap sticks.

- Koori or culture club.

This aspect of the Project was the most valuable to students. In focus groups, students displayed obvious pride and expressed sincere enjoyment regarding their involvement in cultural activities and their ability to learn more about and freely express culture in diverse ways. They also deeply appreciated the evolving understanding of, and respect for culture by their non-Indigenous peers and staff, which supported both their sense of pride and belonging.

There's not many of us that are Aboriginal, it's cool when we have an event that helps other students to connect. We're small but mighty. (Pymble Ladies' College – student)

Several senior students across a few of the case study schools were positive about their school's current approach to achieving outcome 4, but also believed that incorporating and celebrating culture was their basic obligation and that everyone (e.g. non-Indigenous students, staff, and leadership) had the responsibility to educate themselves.

…people don't have a choice to just ignore it. (Kinross Wolaroi School – student)

Equally, cultural activities were what students desired to see more of, and those that they reported missing due the impacts of COVID-19 over the previous few years. Feedback from students included in the final reports indicated that students want to see an increase in the presence of culture that goes beyond 'special occasions', and that there needs to be more variety and involvement from the whole school.

4.5.3 Connections with Indigenous staff and peers

Indigenous members of staff also play a crucial role in fostering cultural pride among Indigenous students, often simply in terms of helping to nurture, guide and validate them, while also serving as cultural role models. Further, the relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the opportunities for peer support facilitated through the Project are other factors in strengthening connection and pride.

It's brought them together, which is fantastic and really strengthened their identity as Aboriginal… (Canberra Grammar School)

The fact that they all understand that essentially, they are one big unit together, really. They've sort of adopted their own little, I guess, brotherhood, where they sort of understand that they've got to support each other… just being a friendly shoulder when they need someone to be there for them. It really allows them to just feel at home and feel safe and be proud of who they are. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)

Case study: Outcome 4 (Kempsey Adventist School)

Activities:

- How to make and play the didgeridoo workshops,
- Clap stick workshops,
- Basket weaving,
- Weekly lunchtime culture workshops,
- Weekly visits to local Indigenous culture park,
- Weekly Indigenous dance workshops

Cultural activities delivered through the Project provided opportunities for students to learn about and connect to Indigenous culture.

Workshop activities were incorporated into NAIDOC Day celebrations to give **students an opportunity to be experts in this area whereas in other areas they may not be**. It was noted that these activities **grew awareness amongst the staff and students...and helped to make the school more inclusive for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders learners and it has given them more pride in their culture.**

The year 9 cohort organised and conducted an Indigenous Games tournament, which included the whole of school and broader community. Community members conducted workshops for years 7-10 such as clap stick painting, playing the didgeridoo, making damper, and Indigenous dance. The day culminated in a ceremony with Indigenous dancing from students and Indigenous staff. There was an overwhelmingly positive response from staff and students as **the ceremony highlighted the unity and support for diversity in our community. The dance was really impactful, and the school community loved it. The students involved displayed a real sense of pride...** Local community members running the workshops on-school grounds has also strengthened school and community links and relationships, which contributes to outcome 6.

A student survey found 90% of students are interested in learning more about their culture, 100% (n=10) of students participated in cultural activities, with most popular being visits to the Cultural Park and the Indigenous dance and didgeridoo workshops, **with one teacher commenting that didgeridoo workshops [were a] a big hit for students and an intrinsic motivator for them to attend**. *After the event,* students from other years began asking to be involved in the next workshops.

4.6 Students have improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing (Outcome 5)

4.6.1 Approach to the success of social, emotional and physical wellbeing outcomes: sensitive and holistic approach

The improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of students is achieved through relationships with the individual student and their family, Indigenous staff and safe spaces together with health and wellbeing initiatives. The core focus on a student's physical health or aim is to enhance their social and emotional skills and provide them with emotional validation. Outcome 5 is a priority focus area of six schools, with progress often seen as an unintended result of activities delivered as part of a school focus on other outcomes.

Further, several schools referenced the wide-reaching positive outcomes that are the result of sensitive and holistic approach to wellbeing, with a focus on cultural safety and provision of varied wrap around supports.

> *It's always been [about] protecting them and their wellbeing and their cultural safety comes first…*
> *(Knox Grammar School)*

For example, one school spoke about taking a more sensitive approach to working with students that may be struggling with their social and emotional wellbeing. They referenced the need for empathy around 'social issues' and reported that this improved students' willingness to approach staff when they are experiencing difficulties. While they attributed this approach to improved wellbeing, they also commented that it increases a student's sense of belonging and enhances their 'learning processes'.

> *The Waratah Project resources and support has allowed us to have more flexibility and a great start to integrate the different support systems… Their wellbeing is definitely, on the whole, much higher than it has been in previous years, and that leads to improved self-esteem. And then they're getting the support academically through the tutoring, which means that they're having gains in that space as well. So I think it's all mixing together to improve overall outcomes…(The Scots College)*

Health and wellbeing initiatives: an emotional literacy program

A major focus with all holistic wellbeing support initiatives is providing students with emotional validation. A related focus being support to Indigenous students with their social and emotional learning, for example through their participation in an emotional literacy[15] program. These efforts are seen as building student's self-esteem, confidence, motivation, initiative, leadership qualities and a sense of responsibility towards others which will be very important aspects of student's quality of school life.

> *We're just making sure that those children… can rely on coming in and having warmth and respect and all the things that get taken away when you don't get that… I think on the back of that, what I see a lot is they're actually getting validated in their emotional needs and physical and mental needs, and spiritual needs. Everything's getting validated by just coming… and they're really connecting with that… (Taree Christian College)*

> *If we look at the social emotional side of things… I think those outcomes, as tricky as they can be to measure, I believe that I'm seeing a shift in the language that we use around relationships and our emotions and things… They all know what we're talking about when we're encouraging them to help each other… So it's been really good and they're helping each other… (Wellington Christian School)*

4.6.2 Positive effects of collaborative relationships with students and families

Building strong relationships with students and their families was prevalent in achieving outcome 5. These relationships enabled students to share more with their teachers but also provided parents with the opportunities to work with schools and make collaborative and informed decisions on the most appropriate interventions.

> *…it would be really nice to hear from other schools what they're doing in their life counselling, the more wellbeing, because even the way that mental health is viewed is so different and there's so much you can do creatively. (St Catherine's School)*

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[15] Emotional literacy refers to the ability to recognise one's emotions, identify triggers, manage emotions, express them appropriately, and empathise with others.

Increasing the student resilience

One school reflected on their approach to difficult emotions and teachers were able to check in via zoom using the program activities, which was well received by students and parents. The school reported that the program enhanced wellbeing and developed students' skills, which resulted in a smoother transition back to school. They also reported reductions in the number of playground incidents, the frequency of anger and anxiety related behaviour incidents in the classroom and an increase in student resilience and their capacity to calm themselves in heightened situations.

Indigenous staff and creation of safe spaces

Indigenous staff and dedicated cultural spaces are credited with creating a culturally safe environment where students can feel comfortable being themselves, while also feeling validated and supported in their emotional, cultural, and academic learning journeys. This includes the ability for students to connect with Indigenous support staff during the day and permission to leave a classroom if they are feeling overwhelmed and identify the need for support. Students in one focus group spoke highly of the dedicated space. They advised that the space was available for them to 'drop in' when needed and feels safe, with one student commenting that the space *to them …sort of feels like home, because we're with our nation (Taree Christian College – student).* The same group of students were also overwhelmingly appreciative of the support provided by their Indigenous teacher, who they feel they can talk to about "any worries they have".

Our core purpose here… it's not just education… it's about shaping, you know, we say all the time, shaping the whole student. The education part of it, that classroom interaction is part of it, but then outside of that, you can't just forget about the rest of the kid because he's not too great, because he's struggling… I think it's okay to sit around… building those relationships. And I think giving teachers awareness as well… We have those meetings… and I know that we still need to do them and they're good, but it doesn't necessarily allow that classroom teacher to understand who's the kid they've got in their class necessarily. And to be honest, all the time, teachers don't come to those meetings, which is frustrating… (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)

Figure 5 A purpose-built Koori Culture room (Taree Christian College)

Case study: Outcome 5 (Taree Christian College)

Prioritising the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students with serious health issues, poor attendance, low self-worth and no confidence, this school aims to intrinsically motivate students by improving their well-being so that they feel valued and are able to engage in school, their culture and build a desire to learn and grow.

Activities:

- Indigenous staff and safe spaces
- Koori classes
- Language classes and signs

> *You can feel a groundswell of confidence amongst the kids. They're starting to come out of themselves a little bit more. They're starting to realize that they do have a significant place. (Taree Christian College)*

In 2021, the school increased the time allocation for the Indigenous Cultural and Welfare teacher (Uncle) so that he is more available for students when needed. He consults with teachers and arrange support meetings with families who have been identified "at risk". He also works with students individually. Uncle observed that most students experience an increase in wellbeing as a result of their support. The teaching staff also have greater awareness about the benefits of allowing students to connect with Uncle throughout the day because of the outcomes being achieved.

> *In Maths [student] used to be quiet and shy and seem to not want to ask questions or participate. To now having the confidence to put her hand up and join in. She is wanting to learn and will ask me to sit with her till she fully understands. She is taking great pride in her success and is always grateful. (parent)*

Students in the focus group, which also included Uncle, displayed an obvious kinship with them and spoke highly of their help and guidance, with one reflecting that *school is fun, but sometimes can be really tough [Uncle] helps with problems.*

Uncle also strengthens relationships with community, family, Elders, both through direct engagement regarding a student as well as through celebrations and events. For example, after an assembly or an awards night there will be a BBQ where the Uncle is available for a yarn. Students like that Uncle and the school gets to know their families. One student commented that Uncle often just asks *how's Mum going and I tell him* commenting that *it's really heartwarming*.

Indigenous culture was also incorporated into school life, such as through Koori Culture lessons that are held in a dedicated room (not Project funded). Students commented that they play *didjeridu*, feel safe and like dropping in there, even during recess, to yarn with Uncle. One staff member also mentioned how *students feel valued and significant as their history is told.*

> *My favourite lesson is Koori Culture. I look forward to that all week. Learn about culture, stories. Also involves games. (student)*

The school also reported that students are "lining up" to learn the Acknowledgement to Country, which is expressed in Language - *they all want to do it*. Further, sports uniforms have Aboriginal design - land, wind, fire, all the elements, which students can now speak in language, and they learn tree names and names of places.

> *I like learning the language a lot. I keep on practicing that. I love all the hard words... I teach the other kids. (student)*

These lessons have enabled students to share their cultural knowledge, and staff see students "teaching teachers", which one student feels is ...*really special. It's been a forbidden culture for many years, and I like when others learn it - teachers and students as well. (student)*

Language signs have also been erected around the school to embed cultural learning across the entire student cohort. When asked how students feel about non-Indigenous students learning about Indigenous culture, one student stated *it really touches my heart how they're learning about it,* with another mentioning how much they like when "other kids" try and use it [language] in the playground*,* e.g., the word for water. One teacher observed that students now seem to *sit up a little straighter when we are speaking of their Culture and their Language.*

With a priority focus on a student's wellbeing, the initiatives that this school have implemented are resulting in progress towards outcomes 1, 4, 6 and 10.

4.7 Strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders (Core relationship outcomes)

Schools have made a concerted effort to establish and maintain strong and culturally informed relationships with students, their families, their home communities and communities local to the school. These relationships have generated an environment of cultural safety and belonging, underpinned student outcomes across all measures, as well as developed the trust of families in the schools' ability to support and educate their child in a way that they are comfortable with. It has also support staff's knowledge and commitment to culture and in turn their confidence in classroom environments.

> *I think our relationships are really good, and because now [due to the Project] we can start to communicate and expand our understanding. We communicated with the kids and [it's about] building our relationships further into the community. As we get stronger [with our approach to community engagement] we're starting to make further links, and that's going to strengthen our relationships… (Narromine Christian School)*

There is already a recognition by schools that genuine and culturally informed relationships and collaboration with students, families and communities take a long-term commitment and the willingness of staff to engage with openness and vulnerability.

> *…build on [relationships], it takes a while to build trust with anyone… I'm confident we can get there. (New England Girls' School)*

However, some schools reflected on their initial focus on activities and initiatives that directly support students, before quickly realising that they didn't have the level of cultural competency embedded across the school to ensure these were delivered appropriately. In particular, they struggled with the need to build positive relationships with students and families from the outset and engage with home communities and those local to the school. As such, some schools pivoted their focus starting with the reflection and truth-telling about the school's current environment and what was needed to generate strong and culturally informed relationships.

As such, efforts to build relationships should start early in a student's transition and a school's journey with the Project. While genuine partnerships with families and communities are a key determinant in a student's success at school, they should be mindful to avoid transactional relationships based only on an individual student's success. Rather there needs to be an investment in enduring and mutually beneficial relationships that extend the Indigenous community more broadly and a school's local community, thereby enabling the integration of culture into curriculum and school life.

That's something I'm wondering about, which is how do we make stronger connections with families to work together on some of those challenges [together]? (Kempsey Adventist School)

4.8 Relationships between school, family and community are strengthened and culturally informed (Outcomes 6)

Eleven schools provided detail and evidence of the progress towards outcome 6 in their final reports, with many others speaking of the importance of relationships more broadly across discussions. Some schools also reported that the strengthened relationships with families and communities was the most valuable outcome, and the one in which the most success had been achieved.

The achievement of outcome 6 was attributed to early and ongoing efforts by schools to engage families and communities in school life, proactively maintaining partnerships and open lines of communication, and prioritising both families and students' cultural safety and sense of belonging.

4.8.1 Achievements of the approach taken by schools to strengthen relationship

Separate to supporting the progress across all other outcomes, the approach taken by schools to strengthen relationships was seen to achieve the following:

*   improved school reputation among families and communities

I would say probably [the school has] a better understanding of needs, particularly for some of the more peripheral Indigenous families who themselves don't always make contact with us… We probably have a better understanding of them… I think our school's actually building a better reputation amongst the Indigenous community just through a number of different things. (Namoi Valley Christian School)

*   appreciation among families for the change they've witnessed owing (at least in part) to the Project

I've had … feedback from parents, saying how they've noticed there is such a [change in] culture… I just got an e-mail from a mum today and saying how much she appreciates it and how it [Indigenous culture] is being incorporated into just everyday classroom life. And it's not like tokenistic… It's just becoming a normal part of our culture. And she thought that was really cool coming from a school which didn't quite have any of that emphasis [before the Project] … (Taree Christian College)

*   confidence in the school's ability to both educate student's and support their wellbeing and cultural identity.

4.8.2 Building strong relationships families and communities

Often the relationships with families and communities are initiated early in a student's involvement or

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transition into school, such as during the interview process with a child or when school staff visit communities prior to the student commencing school. Some schools commented that a more informal approach to getting to know students and their families, such as through home visits, was seen as a positive step by families, with one noting that these interactions provide *a comfortable space whereby connections are formed, and relationships can be forged (Taree Christian College)'.*

In addition to home and community visits, developing trust and facilitating early positive connections was attributed to directly engaging families in school life. Optimally, this meant inviting families into the school and providing opportunities for them to meet with staff and gain an understanding of:

- the ways schools operate on a day-to-day basis

- how culture is incorporated into school life

- how they will support their child's wellbeing and cultural identity e.g., by showing families cultural spaces, meeting Indigenous and other support staff

- the visual recognition and respect for culture e.g., through artwork and the use of language.

> *I've seen a lot of change in the way that our kids come into our school over my last three years…*
> *When the parents come in to meet us… [they're] given a tour around the school… they become*
> *familiar with our faces throughout that process… The families always have an opportunity to meet*
> *and greet the staff members and to be able to have that sense of familiarity before [their children]*
> *even start in the classroom. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)*

> *If we can… invite Elders and other members of the community who have an Aboriginal background…*
> *that'll keep students engaged and interested and also continue our journey so that we've got the*
> *confidence to go out and teach the kids and immerse the kids in their own culture and what*
> *community is all about. (Narromine Christian School)*

4.8.3 Ensuring cultural safety and belonging

Outcome 6 is about ensuring relationships are culturally informed, and as evidenced across all previous outcomes cultural safety and belonging is in essence fundamental to the Project's success. The following activities are common across other outcomes but have been explicitly raised as those that underpin culturally informed relationships with families and communities:

Activities underpinning culturally informed relationships with families and communities

- Involving Elders in celebrations, excursions, and cultural learning activities, and inviting them to speak at events.

- Partnering with Elders and other cultural knowledge-holders on cultural projects and Indigenous curriculum content, both to ensure appropriate cultural authority and accountability e.g., art projects, on Country excursions and language programs, which was seen as *very important to the authenticity of the program and to its cultural competency. (Loreto Normanhurst)*

- Having Elders and Indigenous staff provide cultural guidance to fellow staff and students alike, while also serving as a bridge between the school and the local community.

- Inviting families and communities to participate in the design, development and unveiling of cultural features around the school e.g., plaques, artworks, yarning circles.

Connections with families through the tangible demonstration of a school's commitment

Connections with families are also reinforced through the tangible demonstration of a school's

commitment to the cultural safety and identity of their child as examples as follows:

- providing information on how the school will accommodate cultural needs and obligations should they arise

- proactively seeking information on a student's cultural obligations

- providing information on how the school will provide support and be responsive and respectful when the occasion arises e.g., for Sorry Business or ceremonies.

The families feel welcome to our school, and they feel that it's a culturally safe space to come to. Then they will be happy to send their children to our school each day and our children will also engage with the teaching that's happening at school. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

Fear of cultural loss and challenge with sense of belonging

It is important to note that there is still a fear within some families and communities that a child's schooling or their school environment will result in cultural loss. This mistrust in institutional environments often stems from the impacts of colonisation and assimilation policies, such as the removal of children and forced relocation. It is also historically more prevalent where a child has to leave their community for boarding school. When these fears are relayed to a student, it can create challenges with their sense of belonging and therefore their engagement in school and learning.

As such, actively and appropriately engaging with families and communities and building positive relationships can both alleviate these fears and provide a more constructive perception of education and the broader benefit it can provide for both the individual student and their family, ultimately enabling a more positive and successful experience for all.

There's a perception that they're leaving the culture and it's not maybe recognised that while you can leave the culture, you take the culture with you; you go and develop yourself and you're going to ultimately, hopefully make your culture stronger… So, engaging their communities, engaging their Elders, helping those boys take the pride of their achievements from school back to their communities and to be a shining light in that community… this is actually something that can benefit everyone… I want to make sure that… our efforts are welcomed back in their communities. (Sydney Church of England Grammar School)

4.8.4 Maintaining a partnership approach and open lines of communication with families

Approach to maintain mutual relationship and partnership with families

Schools must work to maintain the relationship and develop an active and open partnership with families, even when a positive connection has been formed. For example, Indigenous staff have expressed that parents appreciate when the school reaches out or simply "pick up the phone" as a way of keeping them informed and engaged. Developing this feedback loop has flow on effects and is an enabler to student outcomes. The indirect result of these relationships is also the deepening of non-Indigenous staff's cultural competency, as they gain a more nuanced understanding of culture and the Indigenous experience through exposure to and communication with families and communities.

The Project has allowed families to engage more easily and feel connected… and that has a positive flow on effect to the [students] who really appreciate the times when their families can attend the college… This allows the families to see first-hand the caring and positive environment that [the school] provides for their children. And the partnership that develops between the school and the family definitely results in students being more motivated, and accountable for their

Ongoing and open lines of communication are also a mechanism to facilitating the family's voice in planning and decision making and ensuring that they feel safe to make requests and seek advice from schools.

Methods to maintain and communicate with families

Survey

Five schools reported soliciting parent feedback through surveys, with one school commenting on the importance of understanding the perspective of families, and ensuring it aligned with that of the school.

> *[it was] wonderful to know what mattered most to them so that we could dive headlong into what we really wanted to be able to do. And I think that's been such a gift. I think they are excited too. (Wellington Christian School)*

Parent committees and forums, facilitating parent involvement through social media channels, and their involvement in the school newsletter were also noted as ways to incorporate the voice of families.

> *Facilitating the newsletter each week gives a voice and a cross-section of voices so that the experience, whether it's a First Nations family or a non-First Nations family, is shared. And I think that that storytelling and that sharing of story and culture is so important. And that for me is what's keeping my connection out into the wider community as well, and I'm hoping that that is a two-way dialogue in that process. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

Regular social events across schools

Lastly, ensuring that families and communities are invited to and involved in regular social events, and those related to culture (e.g., during NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week) are a way in which relationships continue to grow stronger. Examples of these across schools include Friday coffee mornings, Indigenous family nights and barbecues and sporting events.

> *For our Indigenous families… it's really important to have a yarn… What we do for all our parents… and kids is the coffee cart on Friday mornings. It's fantastic with just those opportunities to connect teachers and parents in relationship and community… (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

4.9 Relationships between staff and students are strengthened and culturally informed (Outcomes 7)

4.9.1 Correlation between relationship outcomes and improvement of outcomes across all measures

Relationships between staff and students are one of the most crucial aspects of a student's school life. It is abundantly clear that when these relationships are strong and culturally informed, a student will achieve improved outcomes across all measures. They are also a determinant in facilitating and harnessing the student voice, which is core to their self-determined success and school decision making that privileges the student perspective and experience.

Further, these relationships directly support staff outcomes (outcome 8 and 9), particularly staff's confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices and sensitively managing classroom discussions. As one staff mentioned:

As a teacher, being able to answer the sort of tough questions that come up for [non-Indigenous] students, but also being able to sit… with the Aboriginal students who are in the room as well and helping them have a voice in those conversations… obviously has a huge role in… starting to strengthen, I guess, the confidence of the [Indigenous] students… and broaden, I guess, the thinking and perspectives of the non-Indigenous students in the classroom as well. (Macquarie Anglican Grammar School)

Achievement towards this outcome also flows through to school outcomes (outcome 10) and supports the acknowledgment, value, and integration of Indigenous culture and perspective into curriculum and school life.

Now, the first strategy that we kind of always work with is you want to tap into the knowledge of the boy. And so that's how a staff member can really develop that relationship. And then you can use those classroom strategies and those learning activities to actually learn about the [student] and then also have them feel confident that they have knowledge and they're bringing something into the classroom and they're also feeling valued in the classroom as well. So yeah, you need to build that relationship to understand and be able to ask questions relating to curriculum that also relate to home, or not necessarily home, just their knowledge base. (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)

Relationships are underpinned by the cultural competency of staff, some of which is developed through formal staff training, capacity-building and Indigenous staff but much of which is an organic result of staff's interactions with student's and the two-way learning process that occurs as a result.

4.9.2 The crucial role of Indigenous staff toward relationship building

In all discussions with staff and student's, it is clear there is a strength to the relationships between students and Indigenous staff. Their approach is also inherently culturally safe. Hence, more of the focus on Outcome 7 is the relationships between student's and non-Indigenous staff.

Nevertheless, there is an obvious role of Indigenous staff members in helping to build the capacity of their non-Indigenous colleagues to build better relationships with students. Examples include Indigenous staff facilitating professional learning sessions on protocols and cultural safety and being accessible to non-Indigenous staff to ask questions and seek advice and help smooth overall relations between staff and students.

It's been really fantastic to be able to run some of those ideas past [Indigenous colleague name redacted] just to ensure that they are culturally informed and appropriate. It's nice for our staff to feel that there's a person that they can go to and ask those questions very openly to. I think that's been very positive…(Macquarie Anglican Grammar School)

I kind of act as a bit of an advocate and a go-between for the students, the families, and the school. And as a First Nations person myself, I'm able to then give a unique perspective in terms of sometimes where the girls are coming from, what their experience has been, why sometimes things might be a little bit trickier for them than for other students who aren't First Nations students here and… not so far away from home… So, I think in terms of making those relationships stronger. It's about being able to open up that dialogue and being able to kind of give that perspective to staff. And then I think they start with being able to kind of feel a bit safe to ask questions… when previously they might not have felt comfortable doing that. And it's just breaking down those barriers as well, which, of course, then enhances the relationship… (Pymble Ladies' College – Indigenous staff member)

4.9.3 Staff capacity-building to build the cultural competency

Schools have undertaken significant efforts to build the cultural competency of staff as part of their core

Project priorities and activities, and both their competency and their confidence to appropriately engage students is a key contributor to strong relationships.

There is some specificity to the types of capacity building activities that directly relate to stronger, more culturally informed relationships. It is also felt that professional development activities facilitated through the Project has prompted better critical self-reflection about Indigenous issues among non-Indigenous staff members, transforming the way they relate to students.

It's about teaching staff to understand, like, you know – and it's not just for First Nations boys, really – but I think it's even more imperative for the First Nations boys that you build a relationship. How do you do that? You ask some interesting questions… Just building those relationships is like everything, and I feel like that's an area where staff need some upskilling around… (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)

More extensive detail on staff capacity building activities is outlined in outcome 8. Separately, the following directly contribute to Outcome 7:

- The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program which has encouraged staff to look internally at their own bias, and as a result developed a genuine, authentic understanding and empathy towards students, changing how staff acknowledge students and accept them into the school community.

It has… brought it to people's consciousness, like, "What assumptions am I making about this kid? In what ways am I treating this kid differently?" Like, even if it's just that consciousness-raising, hopefully that has an impact in terms of building better relationships… (Barker College)

4.9.4 Trauma-informed practice and mental health awareness

In addition to formal training, culturally informed relationships between staff and students are often the result of a two-way learning process. There is also a clear appreciation for this learning, and many schools expressed their recognition that both relationships and their cultural understanding is a learning journey.

[Indigenous students] are becoming the teachers… the idea that we learn from each other that we're in a journey of learning together. And certainly, being able to learn from the [students] and from their culture is super important. (Knox Grammar School)

Interestingly staff on many occasions spoke about their interactions with students that may on the surface seem part and parcel of everyday support and teaching, but that were eye opening for staff. Where this occurs, it supports both a staff's capacity and confidence to develop relationships, as well as their commitment and investment as outlined below.

My eyes have been opened so much [by] having [Indigenous student name redacted] in the class, because knowing that… she's part of two land claims where she's from in her genealogy line. Like, we've got a map of all the nations in the class and exactly where she's from… We talk about the language, about body parts, songs, all that sort of thing… And it's something that's not out of the ordinary… it's not, "Oh, now we're going to do something about Aboriginal language" but to try to do it every day… as part of what you do… (Calrossy Anglican School)

4.9.5 Staff commitment and personal investment in culture, teaching and supporting students

Relationships between students and staff often underpin their commitment and personal investment in culture, as well as teaching and supporting students in the most appropriate manner.

If we can step into their shoes and just try to be - yeah, it's different and [there's] different challenges… It's quite known that Indigenous kids have never had a parent go to university… I think I do need to give them that… empathy… (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)

Strategies for staff to rapport with students

There are multiple factors and strategies within this, including cultural competency, but all relate to building deep, personal, and mutually respectful relationships. Examples provided by schools include:

- Getting to know students at a personal level and taking an interest in them as individuals.

- An openness and vulnerability by staff, and a willingness to share stories about their own life and experiences.

The big thing is that the kids will always remember the teachers that they know stuff about… Our kids want to know about us… (Macleay Vocational College)

- Greater empathy for students' experiences and the importance of culture.

- Time and consistency, particularly where a student may have mistrust for the school environment, figures of authority or have experienced trauma and adversity that may create a barrier to their positive engagement with staff, particularly classroom teachers.

I'm so invested in these children… It's not just a job… Getting a pay cheque is nice, but I want to see these little guys… and I want to be here when they graduate… I'll be front-row… I just think they need the consistency, not just in these formative years; they need some of us to be here for as long as we can be… (Taree Christian College)

Figure 7 Indigenous Round of Sport Opening Ceremony (Pymble Ladies' College)

Case study: Outcomes 7 (Pymble Ladies' College)

Activities:

- Professional Learning for staff
- Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs)
- Opportunities for students to share stories
- Cultural celebrations at the school
- Acknowledgement of Country at events
- Staff included in transition programs for students
- Acknowledging Indigenous staff
- Staff presentations (collaborative learning)

Strong leadership has been shown from this school to strengthen relationships between staff and students to improve outcomes for Indigenous students. They are genuinely interested in investing in professional learning for all staff to build cultural competence. They also seek feedback from students, families, community members and staff' and incorporate those different perspectives into executive level decision making.

This has resulted in engaged, supportive and culturally competent school leadership and staff. The flow on effects from this outcome intersects with outcome 9 and 10 and the school has developed strong relationships between staff, students, family, and community. In turn, students feel acknowledged, and have a sense of belonging and a deep connection with the school.

> *When surrounded by my friends and learning with them about diversity and cultural difference of Indigenous people, it then broadens more peoples understanding as well as brings more cultural awareness which is really important for me. (student)*

Hence, their approach to meeting outcome 7 also directly supports improvements in students' academic outcomes (outcome 1)

To do this, the school provided Indigenous specific professional learning opportunities for all staff to build cultural competencies that assist *not only Indigenous students to reach their potential...as the entire community benefits from better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language, and perspective.*

The Project also provided the resources to engage an Indigenous owned company to deliver cultural competency training to 500 teaching, boarding and administration staff (200 in-person and 300 online). They provided an introduction to the kinship system, unconscious bias and current policy and practice. The professional learning was well received by staff as well as students. 100% of respondents said they would (80%) or would maybe (20%) take something from the session to use in their work. A school psychologist who attended a 3-day course in 'Aboriginal mental health assessment and suicide prevention' run by Indigenous Psychological Services (IPS) and shared their learnings with the other schools within their network, supporting the collaborative learning environment within the Project.

Boarding Staff and students also had input into the AIS online module "Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students in Boarding". Currently 26 staff have completed the course and it will be listed in the Professional Learning catalogue for 2022.

Whilst Indigenous specific professional learning was the predominant focus to build cultural competency, having students share their stories in Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs), College newsletters, Acknowledgements of Country, boarding newsletters and school assemblies also proved highly valuable with students *leading and driving change...through their increasing confidence in learning about and sharing their own stories.* Teachers commented that this approach resulted in an acceleration of understandings and *leading to more desire [by students] to learn and share,* as well as an increase in teachers understanding *student's unique talents, knowledge, and circumstances... as well as their culture.*

Students who participated in the focus group could not have been more grateful and encouraging of their school's approach to culture and supporting them. Further, all discussions with staff, Including the Indigenous staff member who support the Project, were incredibly proud to have culture recognised and celebrated as part of school life.

4.10 Engaged, supportive and culturally competent school leadership and staff (Core staff outcomes)

There are corresponding and discreet activities that support progress towards outcome 8 and 9. Collectively these are seen to have achieved their core objective, with schools reporting the following as direct results of their approach:

- The genuine and deep care, concern and efforts of staff and leadership to creating positive change.
- Teachers proactively seeking and considering culture and the Indigenous perceptive.
- An increase in "cultural curiosity" and a personal desire to learn and grow, with staff willing to put themselves "outside of their comfort zone".
- The raised profile of Indigenous education among staff and leadership, across the whole of school environment and the education system more broadly.

[There's a] proactive approach by non-Indigenous staff, teachers, and the like, to engage with culture or, you know, embedding culture into the classroom and curriculum… Teachers are proactively engaging with it, wanting to understand more and more, just sort of pick up those things correctly… (3CSt Andrew's Cathedral School)

It is also important to recognise that 2021 was a year in which schools and their staff felt the cumulative and compounding burden of COVID-19. There were multiple transitions in and out of learning from a home environment and many staff experienced both a personal and professional impact, on top of what occurred throughout the previous year. Yet schools and their staff actively participated in this Evaluation through reporting and engagement and, while there were some instances where schools were unable to participate as well as intended, there was a fierce desire to be a part of the process by whatever means they could.

This observation, as well as the inputs and evidence provided through data collection, is evidence of staff and leadership's engagement and continued commitment to building supportive and culturally competent schools.

As we have progressed from facilitating the education of staff to empowering them to confidently and creatively develop and implement new programs and units of curriculum that are culturally safe. (1CSt Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)

4.11 Staff have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Outcome 8)

4.11.1 Overview of culturally responsive pedagogical practices via Indigenous perspectives.

The formal training provided through the Project and the organic ways in which staff develop their capacity

and skills, such as through relationships and connections made with other schools and being part of a community of practice all contribute to the increased confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices, as do Indigenous staff and relationships with student's families and communities.

In essence, these activities centre culture and make it "natural and a habit" to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. They also generate an awareness of the intersections between a student's academic progress, their cultural identity, and the importance of connecting culture into all aspects of learning. These efforts have been attributed to an increase in the integration of Indigenous content into the curriculum, which was raised by most schools across all data collection methods, and the confidence of staff to use Indigenous ways of communicating and learning.

Examples of Indigenous ways of communicating and learning

Storytelling:

One teacher commented on the use of Indigenous ways of storytelling to create space in which students feel safe to share and express themselves.

> *[We] want to get to a point where an Indigenous perspective or lens is really almost everything that we do… and it actually connects to every everything we do… The goal is to not have isolated lessons, but to have these lessons embedded into it quite authentically… across many contexts… (Knox Grammar School)*

Indigenous curriculum contents:

A few schools were firm in their view that they have moved beyond tokenism to authentically integrating Indigenous perspective and the Indigenous voice. This sentiment is indicative of the broader and collective progression of schools as evidenced through the extent in which Indigenous curriculum content was raised.

> *I think looking at the curriculum… I think with the staff becoming more confident… they've been able to turn their mind to making sure that it's interwoven with what they're teaching… in their everyday classroom, which I think is really good. There's definitely more and more coming into the classroom throughout the whole school, making it more normalised. And this is what we do, which is good. (Loreto Normanhurst)*

> *…there's the Western worldview [and] the Aboriginal worldview at school pretty much all the time… I guess a pedagogical kind of critical skill is to try and value the Aboriginal worldview as highly as the Western worldview; to say your numbering system is as valid as the Western numbering system; your idea of science, mapping, Country, animals, all these things are just as valid. So how do you get that into the curriculum?… Something that's actually embedded in the pedagogy… Songlines is equally as valid a mapping system as we have in the West… Just different ways of looking at the world and looking at Country… (Narromine Christian School)*

Consequently, progress towards outcome 8 has flow on effects to all student outcomes and is directly supportive of outcome 1.

4.11.2 Culturally responsive pedagogical practice through staff capacity building

Capacity building and professional development is notably the most prevalent way in which staff build knowledge, skills and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Six of the eight that reference outcome 8 as a priority outcome in their final reports included it as an activity, with many others indicating the alignment with outcome 8 in focus groups.

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program

The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, facilitated by the Stronger Smarter Institute, was raised by six

schools in focus groups, with an additional three (from eight) schools providing detail in their final reports[16]. 5 out of 25 schools supported their staff to participate in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, referring to it when discussing progress towards outcomes 1, 6, 8 and 9. This program was seen by schools as not only building skills and confidence but providing the practical tools needed to develop and implement pedagogical practices through a cultural lens. Several staff expressed gratitude for the course in empowering them to "think outside the box" and incorporate culture into traditional school-based subjects, such as Mathematics, Legal Studies, History and Geography and Science. One teacher commented that culture has become *normalised and natural in my own teaching (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth).* There were also several reports of the course being the most valuable professional development undertaken by themselves, and other staff to date.

> *The head of the school [and I] were able to engage in a PD with the Stronger Smarter Institute in Sydney… It was a unanimous sort of feeling across all – and I think it was about 26 staff there from across lots of schools from New South Wales – that it was the best PD they've ever done. It was truly incredible… because they didn't just sort of… say, "Okay, you can go home now and try and… implement the skills you've learned in your own schools", but it gave us the skills to actually be able to do that… I left the PD with a lot of amazing ideas that we're looking forward to implementing in the very near future… (Macquarie Anglican Grammar School)*

Cultural awareness and competency training

The other types of staff capacity building activities that support Outcome 8 included cultural awareness and competency training, which was achieved through the Stronger Smarter Institute, other externally run training courses, as well as presentations by Elders and community members.

> *[the] cultural competency class that was run with staff was really great. It helped them to collect a bunch of tools when dealing with our [students] and having that sense of confidence in being able to teach our girls, and the confidence in their own knowledge as well… Some staff did lack that confidence, or weren't sure if what they were doing was the right thing or not, so I think that by doing that course – and when it was delivered to be relevant to our school situation – it did give them that confidence that, "Actually, I am doing the right thing" or, "Oh, I shouldn't be doing this" … I think staff appreciated it. (Loreto Normanhurst)*

Conferences were also seen as an opportunity to engage with likeminded people, share perspectives and gain and understanding of which other schools were implementing culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

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[16] Data is not indicative of how many schools have supported staff to participate in Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, it only represents those that have referenced it in their final reports or focus groups.

Case study – Outcome 8, an ongoing process of learning and evolution (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill) One school provided an exemplary overview of their approach to outcome 8, describing it as an ongoing process of learning and evolution throughout their commitment to the Project over many phases.

Initially the school pursued practices to inform staff but now focus on implementing strategies and activities that promote direct, self-initiated action. They indicated this step-change is indicative of **the successful education of staff, to the point that students, families, and the staff themselves feel confident in their ability to implement a culturally safe curriculum**. Hence the enhancements made to existing activities have yielded greater, more wide-reaching results and progress.

Examples comprise of restructuring the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Party from Indigenous staff only, to including three members of the Leadership Team, who have direct oversite of middle-management and all teaching staff. The result of this an increase in the staff accountable for embedding culturally safe curriculum from four to over 120. Further, Heads of Department are now required to identify at least one other area of their curriculum in which they will revamp the unit of work to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives authentically into the curriculum. With the intention that this be designed and implemented in collaboration with students and community members. Other activities include a whole-school curriculum planning review and development of a formal curriculum for the Indigenous Cultural Tutoring Program, as well as holding Indigenous Curriculum Week and undertaking other RAP strategies.

Their approach was reported to empower staff to act with confidence and undertake classroom activities and pedagogical practices of their own volition, sharing their knowledge and practice with leadership and other teaching colleagues in the process. In turn, this underpins a cyclical learning environment and is a factor to embedding a commitment to the Project outcomes across the whole of school environment. The school has commented that this enhanced approach is **arguably [the] most significant step towards whole-school cultural competency since the inception of the Project. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)**

Having been to this conference for the past week, it's been absolutely extraordinary being privileged enough to have a whole week where Indigenous perspectives were really top of the agenda and talk with other… like-minded people and other people who are experts in the field and gaining that knowledge… (Knox Grammar School)

4.11.3 The collaborative approach

Interschool collaboration and the connections made through project meetings and other events, as well as visits to schools within and outside each network of schools was seen as a powerful tool in capacity and confidence-building and the cross-fertilisation of ideas among schools and their staff.

Having the opportunity to have conversations with other schools who have gone through the same process and look deeply at our inner inhibitions and where we sit and, you know, where we see culture and academics in the school for our kids and what it would look like to make changes to be able to improve – that was really powerful. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

This collaboration ultimately facilitated a learning environment, in which staff could link with others who were working towards the "same vision and focus". Similarly, the personal connections that are developed and the sharing of information that occurs naturally through these activities further instilled staff's commitment to their own individual growth. As such, the collaborative model contributed to achieving both outcome 8, as well as 9.

Further detail on the activities delivered and holistic outcomes achieved by through the collaborative approach are outlined in <u>section 5.2</u>.

4.11.4 A Community of Practice

The community that exists within a school environment and supports positive practices relating to the Project and outcome 8 is seen to be made up of staff, including Indigenous staff and students. It is underpinned by relationships, active collaboration and the desire to learn from each other. It is also seen to result in a reflective practice that reinforces a continuously evolving and enhancing approach.

Indigenous staff in particular play an incredible role in guiding and enhancing the cultural responsiveness of pedagogical practices by non-Indigenous staff, as well as their delivery. Their role could not be seen as more valuable by non-Indigenous staff, who credit their Indigenous colleagues as role models and key enablers to their developing knowledge, skills, and confidence and the enhance of practice.

One Indigenous teacher reflected on previous feelings of isolation when working in schools where they were attempting to integrate culturally responsive practices on their own. They advised that knowing there is a shared commitment to doing the "cultural work" makes them feel "chuffed". They also see the approach as being embedded across the school and feel it is no longer relegated to silos, stating that is now a *sense now of a collective effort and mission.*

Lastly, it was mentioned by schools that students play a valuable role in the community of practice and staff need to be willing to learn as much from their students, as students should from their teachers, with one teacher describing this two-way learning as *enriching (Knox Grammar School).*

> *We're learning as much as they are… The [students] are amazing and they guide us through their culture…*
> *(Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)*

4.12 School leadership are engaged, supportive and committed to improving (Outcomes 9)

4.12.1 Strong leadership and commitment to improve Indigenous student's outcomes

The pilot evaluation noted that in Phase 1 strong and committed senior leadership was identified as a critical enabler in achieving change in all participating schools. As such in Phase 2 this area of focus was included as its own intended outcome. The report also highlighted the cyclical process whereby strong leadership from the Principal and/or other Executive members provided impetus for the Project, and project activities and progress in turn shifted the understanding and cultural awareness of leadership staff and their commitment to improving Indigenous students' outcomes.

These findings align with this Evaluation, with an engaged leadership cohort seen as "driving change from the top". As listed, there are countless direct and indirect positive results attributed to either the prioritisation of Outcome 9, or from the efforts of leadership to support the Project. Some of the more commonly cited approaches are detailed further in the sections below.

Direct and indirect positive results attributed to prioritisation of outcome 9:

- accountability for the Project's design, implementation, and continued evolution
- increased staff capacity building and professional development opportunities
- improved accountability to families and the community for student outcomes and the inclusion of culture
- integration of cultural governance mechanisms
- increased allocation of time for staff to provide Indigenous education and student support

- facilitation of student and family voice in planning and decision making e.g., First Nations Student Representative Council, parent survey's

I think the school leadership has always been engaged and supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Indigenous students. I suppose what the Waratah Project has done is made it a much more explicit approach… When policies and the decisions [are] being made, there is a clear consultation with those students' needs… to ensure that we are committed to… constantly improving the outcomes of Indigenous students. (St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill)

- a school's investment in reconciliation e.g., through the development and implementation of a RAP

- responsible and targeted spending of Project funds

- recognition of and support for cultural governance mechanisms, cultural oversight and authority

…as Elder-in-residence… what I want to talk about is cultural governance… I've been able to have that conversation in different spaces, especially at the executive level. And one thing that [the school] has actually given us… is the time for myself and some of the other staff… to talk about the about the cultural practices and the governance and also, like, all the protocols that go around the way that we do things as First Nations people as opposed to the Western ways. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

- mitigation of the potential "siloing" of culture

- additional Indigenous curriculum and learning resources

Our principal… I just know that he knows that this is of value. And there's a reason as to why we've been given this funding in this Project and the work that's gone behind it. I think he's beginning to see the real importance of that. And, you know, we've been in discussions with him in regards to introducing language into the high school and as part of the full curriculum there. And I think, you know, slowly his mind is opening up to that being a possibility and recognising the value and importance of that, not only for our Indigenous students, but for our non-Indigenous students in being part of this community and what it means to be living on [Indigenous] land… Just having this Project as a thing has meant that the leadership of our school has had to value it, and I think I can see that in our principal. (Taree Christian College)

Engaged, supportive and committed leadership ultimately underpins all other outcomes, and directly contributes to the integration of culture into curriculum and school life and therefore it's overarching success. However, staff from across many schools also felt that leadership needed to enhance their support for the Project, show consistent commitment and buy-in and actively communicate the schools' approach and objectives across the school and community. For example, it was mentioned by one school that the promotion of the Project or culture e.g., using social media, without genuine buy-in from leadership can be perceived as tokenistic. The engagement and support of leadership was also seen as a way that schools could move beyond tokenism and tick-a-box approaches and into the integration and recognition of Indigenous culture into the school environment.

Progress towards outcome 9

It was suggested that progress towards Outcome 9 would benefit from the following:

- Allocation of additional staff to carry out the work involved in designing and delivering the Project.

- Allocation of dedicated staff hours to building relationships with students, families, and communities, rather than staff having to do this alongside their normal roles.

> *Sometimes I find it hard to keep building relationships with students because the lack of time, like even, for example, at lunch today, I really had to get some parent emails sent out at lunch… So, it's really hard sometimes to always be able to find the time to sit down and build the relationships with them and knowing when to prioritise that over all the other things you have to do… I'm not really sure what can be done about that… but I think a challenge, I would say is having the time to juggle all of these relationships… in a way that's actually sustainable. (Taree Christian College)*

- Leadership actively engaging with families and communities.

- Leadership developing positive relationships with students, rather than interactions that only occur through disciplinary interventions.

- Open and transparent internal communications about the Project to ensure that the whole school cohort is "on the same page", understands its value and is aware of how Project funds are being directed.

- School leadership form an Aboriginal Education Team, that is representative of staff members across the school (i.e. Aboriginal staff, teaching staff, school executive, Primary/Secondary, support staff, parent/community reps), to drive, monitor and evaluate Project activities.

4.12.2 Support for staff capacity-building from leadership

One of the ways that leadership have shown their engagement in and commitment to the Project is through their support of culturally focussed professional development opportunities, both for the leadership team and broader staff. As outlined in outcome 8, many schools have supported staff to participate in the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, with one school noting that the course was attended by 20 staff. Staff across these schools see immense value in the program, and there is a collective sentiment that the opportunity to participate shows *great support [of culture] from leadership (Loreto Normanhurst).*

The following capacity building activities that were also included in the final reports as ways in which schools progress towards the achievement of outcome 9:

- A series of presentations by Indigenous staff to the wider school cohort.

- Staff participation in the Indigenous Education Forum, which is a collaboration between UTS Jumbunna and eight independent schools.

- Staff participation in the Connecting to Country (AECG), Eight Ways of Learning professional development program.

4.12.3 Collaborative approach and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) supported by strong leadership and schools

Investments in Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) are being used to establish stronger frameworks of accountability that improve Indigenous outcomes within the school context. Where a school's intent is seen as genuine, different perspectives are valued and taken into consideration. The most beneficial and meaningful outcomes emerge when RAP working parties invite a collaborative approach with staff, non-Indigenous staff, students, non-Indigenous students and community members. In this way, the development process results in authentic objectives, strategies and actions being embedded into the RAP; thus, providing a more holistic outcome that stands to garner a more engaged and supportive response from the whole of school and community. It also ensures the investment and accountability attributed to ensuring the RAP are ratified in their entirety.

> *Well, if we've signed up for it, we don't want to look like we're not doing what we should do. And I think that's provided an impetus all the way up… to continue with a Reconciliation Action Plan… which is not going to be just a tick-a-box plan. And we're going to review it every year. We're going to make it work… That's my pledge to it… We're ready to do this now and we're ready to do it in an authentic way. (Canberra Grammar School)*

> *RAP Group made up of 27 staff across 17 departments, and a call has also gone out for student members. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

> *greater diversification in engagement and leadership in the Indigenous Education space beyond the immediate domain of our IEL new leadership position Chief People and Culture Officer (CPCO). Feedback from staff, families, community members and students has been gathered. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

> *[The RAP process] kind of enabled me personally to reflect on how community could be involved more as well, like how the community perceives… getting engaged… It was nice to be involved in that process and think from a policy perspective, you know, having lots of people from different [backgrounds]… coming together and thinking about community as a whole and rather than just top managers thinking about community. And I thought that was really rewarding and meaningful to be part of… (Pymble Ladies' College)*

4.13 Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life (Outcome 10)

4.13.1 Strategies and activities undertaken within Outcomes 10.

As evidenced across all other outcomes there is noticeable positive progress towards Outcome 10, and most of the activities undertaken within this outcome are supportive of its achievement.

Six schools include detail on this outcome in their final reports, with the most common activities relating to cultural activities and events, language and art programs and the engagement of families and community in school life. In addition to the school reports, discussions with schools indicate that the collaborative approach, an increase in Indigenous classes and the use of Indigenous curriculum, Indigenous staff and an investment in a Reconciliation Action Plan all support the enhanced integration of Indigenous culture and the acknowledgment and value of Indigenous perspectives.

While the activities undertaken to progress Outcome 10 are often duplicative, the emphasis on this as an outcome has meant that culture is now regarded as having the same value, if not more in the case of

students, and school's traditional focus areas.

It does seem like if you look historically over time, certainly since I've been at the school… it sort of did sit in little silos, whereas now you can see that it is interwoven throughout boarding and day and different faculties and there's a lot more, yeah, because of that communication, it is much more widespread and it's almost like, well, it's just part of our school community rather than something that we have to do because we have to satisfy, you know, a certain target or what we need to be. (Loreto Normanhurst)

In essence, it has put Indigenous perspectives at the 'front of mind' for schools, staff and students, particularly for those who had previously not had in-depth exposure to culture. As commented by one school the *simple stuff like our '"word of the week" has meant that that's just part-and-parcel of what happens around the school. The fact that language is now appearing on every classroom, on every doorway, on every entry and exit, so to speak, so kids are becoming familiar with it. They're all simple things, but it's just making sure that there is a positive experience with it…(Casino High School)*

Moreover, the Project is seen to directly contribute to the pride students feel towards culture and resulted in a shift in the mindset of non-Indigenous staff and students. Many schools have commented on the increase in knowledge and recognition of culture in non-indigenous students and their enthusiasm to be a part of cultural activities. There is also the perspective that efforts through the Project have removed the "us and them" mindset and with others reflecting on the increase in cross-cultural friendships.

The whole culture of the school has changed – as in, everyone is together. It's not like it used to be… Like, I noticed in the classrooms that the kids are using the language and the Indigenous kids are actually helping the non-Indigenous kids to pronounce it and… explain what it's all about and all that… It's really, really good to see. (Casino High School)

The holistic efforts by schools is being recognised and appreciated by families and the community, with one school commenting how "humbling" it is to see community interacting with the school more than ever. Schools also report immense positive feedback and an improvement in their reputation. All of which contribute the enduring relationships outlined in section 4.3.

It appears that people in the community are now recognising that we're trying this out… not just trying it out, but we're in it for good. And we made it and we're making an impact…(Narromine Christian School)

Overall, efforts undertaken to recognise, respect and Integrate culture are seen by schools as "sowing the seeds" for the future and progress towards genuine reconciliation.

I think often there may not always appear to be some sort of sign that you can see that's had an impact on this [student] now, but it's ongoing and this is the next generation of people who are going to go out into the community. And if we see them changing their perspective or putting thoughts into their mind that will change their perspective, I think that's fabulous and I think that's what's happening. (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)

Activities that have been cited as contributing to outcome 10 are listed below. Limited detail is provided due to their duplication with activities and the change they result in outlined in previous sections of this Evaluation.

Cultural activities and events

- Language and art programs

- On-Country excursions and cultural immersion programs for staff and students

- Integrating First Nations culture into perspectives in school curriculum

Visibility in the curriculum, academic life, and the physical environment

- Language programs

- Indigenous science programs

- Additional Indigenous literature and resources

> *From being in the library, I've just really noticed, I mean, before we didn't really have any up-to-date and current Indigenous literature. We all now do. Like, for instance… we have all but two of the texts that they've recommended, you know, to use in your classroom. And last year we couldn't have said that. So, when the kids are using those, I think they're seeing a difference just from the literature. (Wellington Christian School)*

- Indigenous gardens

- Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

- Visual art e.g., banners, murals, Indigenous designed uniforms for staff and students

> *That mural stands out because from two main directions coming to our school that is visually right there in front of everybody as visually appealing, like it just draws you to it… It's that sense of culture and linking the school with Aboriginal culture and everything else. (Narromine Christian School)*

- Yarning circles

> *The installation of the circle is a really positive result in the community. It's very visual and I love the openness of the way we can interact with it and use it. And so that's been very positive. (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

Relationship-building with families and community

- Volunteering support from families e.g., running events, fundraising for Indigenous scholarships, sporting events

- Culturally appropriate parent forums

> *One of the other initiatives… is our yarning session with parents… It's not so much a chat in regards to school, but more of a yarn with the parents. And the parents have suggested some wonderful things: getting Indigenous Elders in to talk to the group, which can then flow into those Elders coming in and visiting the school. So that's been a great idea… Of course, morning tea and coffee is provided at these sessions, and it's been quite positive. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)*

- Partnerships with Indigenous organisations, often facilitated by families

> *Because of the work that we've doing here, a pupil's parent who works in a… small multinational company came to me at the start of the year to say that his company had decided they needed to do more in the First Nations space. So, he's working with us to fund a scholarship for an additional Indigenous student from Year 7 to 12. And that would be an ongoing thing, not only here, but also now he's motivated to work with the boy's school as well. So that company is going to fund students. And he said that he's really, really touched by the work that he sees happening at [this school] … so there is an impact. (Pymble Ladies' College)*

4.13.2 Positive influence of Indigenous staff as role model and cultural educators

Hiring and supporting Indigenous staff was key to schools progressing in Outcome 10. Indigenous staff provided students with culturally safe support and mentorship which in turn increased their engagement and confidence. Most importantly, students were able to see themselves reflected in Indigenous staff, who served as positive role models and cultural educators.

> *I think that a really positive thing that we do is to have an Indigenous coordinator and have somewhere that the girls feel that they are always welcome and safe to ask for support, which is another layer on top of the support that we already have. (St Catherine's School)*

Indigenous staff also provided cultural advice to their non-Indigenous colleagues, with many finding these relationships extremely beneficial to their teaching practices. For non-Indigenous staff, there can be hesitancy around asking Indigenous staff questions regarding their culture for fear of saying the wrong thing. Creating a neutral space where non-Indigenous staff can receive cultural advice breaks down barriers and supports staff to deliver authentic experiences for their students. Although, ensuring that Indigenous staff are not burdened with cultural load is vital.

> *[Indigenous staff member name redacted]… She's our Aboriginal education consultant, and that's a paid leadership position… We… ask her questions around cultural protocols and safety and so forth… questions perhaps that [staff are] too afraid to ask elsewhere… (St Andrew's Cathedral School)*

Other activities performed by Indigenous staff include:

- Providing school based professional learning and cultural awareness training

- Providing strategic guidance and oversight, e.g., with Reconciliation Action Plans, Personalised Learning Plans

- Breaking down stereotypes:

> *It's breaking down the stereotypes. It's all about building that friendship and that connection. (Knox Grammar School)*

- Facilitating connections with the local community

- Makes a statement to the broader community:

> *I think having [Indigenous staff member name redacted] here, there is a presence and that makes a big statement that this is important to us as a school. And I think it raises awareness… and just brings it more to the forefront… what we're doing and how we're going about things (Abbotsleigh)*

4.13.3 Staff capacity-building and positive impact on schools

The Waratah Project has allowed schools to connect and learn from each other, with staff sharing experiences and growing together through collaborative learning. These interactions have had a significant and positive impact on schools, reinvigorating staff and showing them how to implement culturally responsive pedagogies. Schools have reported staff increasing in confidence and experiencing greater connections with their students as a result.

> *The Waratah Project has had and continues to have a significant and positive impact on us, on our school life. Just in the time that I've been involved in the professional conversations that staff have… with each other regarding the Indigenous students has really seemed to have gone up at another level. People are really aware when they have Indigenous students and how the life of that Indigenous student, you know, what's going on in their life, how is that impacting how someone*

4.13.3 Unconscious bias and School's challenge

Unfortunately, there are still indications of the work that needs to be done. While schools recognise that cultural competency and the integration of culture is a journey, students and their families still experience the racism and stereotyping in the schooling environment. The experience of racism by both students and Indigenous staff, which is concerning considering that cultural safety and belonging is the greatest determinant of Project success and a right that all Indigenous people have. Some schools also mentioned the continued need to focus on breaking down stereotypes and stigmas about Indigenous people among non-Indigenous students and working towards alleviating unconscious bias.

In addition to overtly racist experiences, microaggressions or less than culturally sensitive approaches still occur, with one school mentioning that there is a *lot of goodwill in the staff, but there's still a lot of ignorance (Canberra Grammar School)*. Further to this there is evidence of the following:

- not using, or not seeking information on the correct pronunciation of Indigenous names and words

- expecting Indigenous students to be the experts on all things Indigenous

- a lack of awareness or sometimes empathy for students' cultural contexts, life situations, and what they might be dealing with outside of school.

Further detail in the types of cultural training that may further shift mindsets and improve the experiences of all Indigenous people in a school environment is discussed in <u>section 7.1</u>.

Figure 8

(Kinross Wolaroi School) Girls dance group that performed at the

official opening of [name redacted, local business].

Figure 9

The Boys performing the Reconciliation Week and Indigenous Round of Rugby at (Kinross Wolaroi School). Uncle with Kangaroo cloak and the boys with the spears that they made.

Case study: Outcome 10 (Kinross Wolaroi School)

Activities:

- Relationships with families and the community
- Language and art programs

One school has taken a holistic approach to enhancing the acknowledgement and value of Indigenous perspective and culture across the whole of school and community. They have actively engaged with the local community to ensure the activities and initiatives *are* appropriately *and respectfully informed, especially in relation to the Wiradjuri Country [they] are on*, recognise the *shared history and build on the knowledge of [local] First Nations People.*

The Project has allowed this school to implement a First Nations Language Program for primary students that is set within their local cultural heritage context and has been developed and delivered by an Indigenous support worker/teacher and the Head of Indigenous Studies. Teachers are supporters of the lessons and learn alongside students. During remote learning families were also engaged too.

There are overwhelmingly positive results that indicate students are invested in learning about language, grammar, and conventions of language in relation to speaking, listening, and writing. They also have *awareness and knowledge of the place, space, and world in which they live in relation to a First nation context and are accepting, appreciative and hold greater knowledge and understanding of what it is to be First Nations, and how it can and should be celebrated.* Interestingly, it quickly became evident that *students were grasping parts of language quicker and more fluently than the adults.*

I love Wiradjuri because I love learning the language and learning where the sacred sites are. I have loved learning what the totems are, mine is a bilby because my birthday is in March. I just love [redacted language name]. (student)

 Our students know what it is to be [name of community redacted], what the totems are, what are men's and women's sites and other culturally specific information. They know who the local Elders are, they are aware of the local names and the significance of these.

The program will be continued for a second year in 2022 and will roll the program out to secondary students. There are also plans to have an outside classroom with a traditional yarning circle and for Wiradjuri language classes.

The program is also woven into First Nations art projects by using language in art, on canvas', kangaroo skin cloaks, woodwork projects and flora and fauna projects. Further still, the school has Boys and Girls Dance groups who have performed in community and at school events and have broader community engagement and participation. Additional activities, including wellbeing days are held On-Country with smoking ceremonies, traditional art, and yarns with Elders.

For all that is being done, though, there are still areas where some students feel their culture is not present in school culture, for example only being celebrated during NAIDOC week. As a collective they also expressed the need for additional Indigenous staff, with one commenting that they would *benefit from another Indigenous support person, preferably female. That way we can go to a female support. Someone that we can relate on a person level.*

The school talks big about culture, and I know COVID has impacted that a lot, but since being here I haven't seen much culture (student)

The school has identified outcome 6 as one of their priorities but included detail on outcome 10 in the report. Their approach is also directly supportive of outcomes 6,7 and 9, which again demonstrates the interconnectedness of the Framework.

5. Outcomes of a collaborative approach

5.1 Collaborative approach and success of the Project

This Evaluation finds that the Hub and Spoke model is a structural component of the Project that underpins holistic success and is highly valued by participating schools, enabling sharing of best-practice and learning across all schools and staff.

> *[The] Project has really allowed for us to be able to network in a way that we couldn't have done previously. (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)*

Similar to the previous pilot evaluations, this Evaluation found that the collaborative approach enables success of the Project through the sharing of experiences and the ability for schools to provide each other with mutual support, including guidance and expertise to schools early in their journey from those schools who have participated in over a longer period. This includes hub schools directly supporting spokes within their network, as well as the collective support that is provided through engagement and activities where all schools participate. The collaborative approach is further enriched through the Project coordination and support provided to schools by the AISNSW and their emphasis on building genuine relationships and empowering schools to deliver the Project within their own context.

The specific outcomes as cited by schools and attributed to the approach are outlined below. There is also clear alignment to outcomes 8 and 9, meaning the approach directly supports the knowledge, skills, confidence of staff and school leadership to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices and ensures their commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

> *…and how they implement culturally responsive pedagogy. It was just kind of great seeing that in practice and not just chatting about it. (Knox Grammar School)*

Interestingly, the school reports refer to personal connections and relationships and collaborative learning as both the most prevalent outcomes, as well as those that experience challenges and provide the greatest opportunities for enhancement. Schools have expressed their change, as per their status along a Partnership Continuum, and as shown in Figure 9 most participating schools have experienced enhanced partnerships within their network as a result of the Project. Though it is also worth noting that COVID-19 caused disruption to the ways in which schools ideally connect and share and in some cases hindered collaboration and was a barrier to progressing along the continuum as far as they hoped.

Movement along the Partnership Continuum from project commencement to December 2021

Of the 25 schools 7 felt that their partnership status within school network had increased, with these schools showing movement from awareness and networking, through to co-operating and collaborating. However, most schools remained relatively static, noting their status as remaining at networking or only increasing one dimension.

Two schools felt they their status had decreased from cooperating to awareness, attributing this to challenges of meeting online. However, of those two schools, one also expressed deep gratitude for the support provided by AISNSW and other schools in their network, indicating an honesty in their response and perhaps a change in status that may naturally resolve when in person networking recommences.

Figure 9 Partnership continuum

Lower communication, time and trust

Higher communication, time and trust

Awareness   Networking   Coordinating   Cooperating   Collaborating

Individual purpose, resources, planning and delivery

Shared purpose, resources, planning and delivery
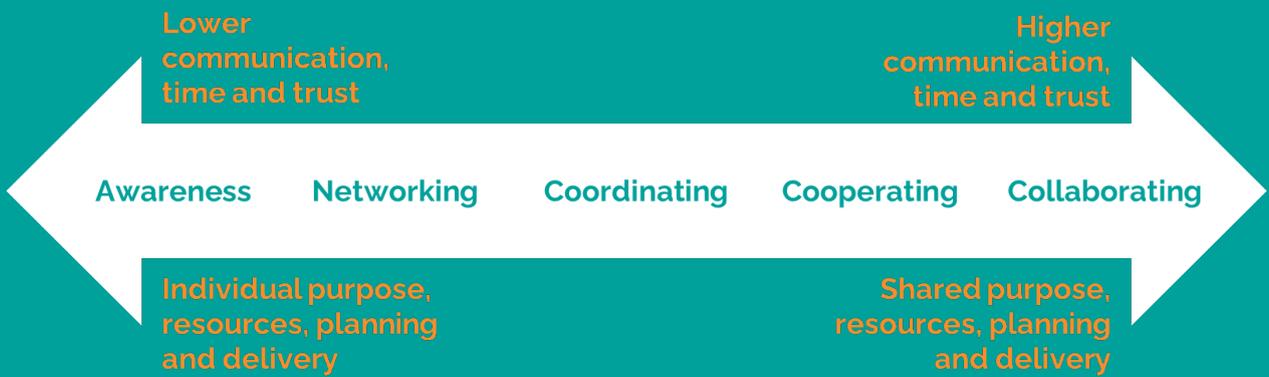
5.2 Personal connections and relationships

Schools and their staff deeply value the relationships that have been developed across schools, both within their network and the collective group who are participating in the Project. The depth of these relationships was apparent to the research team in their interactions with participating schools, as well as being expressed by nearly all of those involved.

Face to face gatherings were seen as enabling schools to bond. Many staff spoke in detail and with delight about opportunities to visit other schools. Often it was the organic interactions and the informal networking, for example, opportunities during dinners and lunches that deepened the connections between staff. One hub school referenced a mini conference that was held at one of the spoke schools. The mini-conference included presentations and networking opportunities. The feedback from this networking event was hugely positive from each of the schools that attended.

Some schools noted that geographic isolation made it difficult to participate in face-to-face activities and should be taken into account in the planning of activities and allocation of resources. Schools also reflected

on how much they missed visiting other schools and meeting together while unable due to COVID-19 restrictions. Regardless, the connections made over the Project's life have created a strong foundation to build from, with schools seeing 2022 as an opportunity to continue strengthening these established professional connections and relationships.

It's allowed us to develop relationships across sectarian lines. It's allowed us to engage in, you know, ideas that we wouldn't have thought of. Just sitting around a table, having dinner with a group of people from other schools, exploring what they're doing in this space has seemed simple but has been incredibly powerful. And none of those things that I've just suggested would have happened without the Project moving forward. (Macquarie Anglican Grammar School)

5.3 Collaborative learning

The ability to collaborate and share learnings was seen by schools as inspiring, empowering and *exceptionally valuable for new ideas and problem solving (Barker College)*. It also facilitates continuous reflection, which resulted in schools refining and evolving their approach. Schools felt that opportunities to conduct interschool visits and witness activities firsthand provided a more tangible understanding of the different ways in which schools deliver the Project and therefore better equip them to transfer learnings.

I think one of the greatest things that that I've experienced with this with this program was when we're able to go to those different schools and see how each different school did it in culture and in Aboriginal studies. And we came back with a lot of pearls of wisdom from each one of those different places. (Taree Christian College)

Collaborative learning is an outcome in its own right, as well as being intrinsically linked to the personal and professional development of staff, which has in many cases occurred organically through interactions with and exposure to other participating schools. It also is one of the ways in which new ideas are spurred and confidence to work with students to deliver the Project is built.

We get magnificent ideas from other schools. (Casino Christian School)

Collaborative learning was also achieved through activities such as the interschool conference, more formal mentoring activities between hub and spoke schools, Project meetings and other types of training provided by the AISNSW.

A challenge to collaborative learning was the differences in school contexts. For example, some government schools identified the flexibility available to independent schools to provide alternate opportunities to their students, such as excursions and cultural immersion programs in remote communities, that would not be possible for them due to resourcing and capacity constraints. The size of the student cohort was also mentioned. For example, some schools have much larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts, whereas others are significantly smaller. Hence, while there are many transferable learnings, schools also need the flexibility and skills to translate these within their own environments.

Journey together, is together. (St Andrew's Cathedral School)

5.4 Collective approach to change

In addition to the more prevalent outcomes outlined above, the collaborative approach was seen to drive motivation and boost school's commitment to the Project through an increased appreciation for the collective approach to change they are undertaking. This was seemingly related to a sense of 'togetherness', and the shared commitment to an incredibly important cohort of students and broader societal need. There was also a view that the approach inspires schools with their staff feeling part of

something bigger.

Possibly one of the best aspects of it is that we're all in this together sort of nature of it. (Kinross Wolaroi School)

5.5 Challenges to connection and collaboration

Most schools, either though focus groups or in their final reports, commented how challenging it was to maintain consistent connections throughout 2021. With many expressing sadness and disappointment that they were not able to participate in face-to-face activities.

We feel have built strong relationships across the Waratah Project Hub group which I think fosters trust amongst the group. It allows others to express concerns and ideas openly which is important for the future work. I feel the barriers that Covid has created in terms of visiting schools has put some limitations on the model. Meeting in person will create space for greater depth of work in this space next year and beyond hopefully. (Participant – project discussion board)

The impacts of COVID-19 meant that there was a considerable decrease in collaboration. For example, it was felt by some that networking "was not great" and meeting online inhibited knowledge sharing and hindered progress. Broadly schools saw this as an unfortunate occurrence and one that they hoped would be corrected in the coming year. Also worth noting was gratitude expressed for the ongoing contact from the AISNSW, which some schools felt mitigated the worst of the potential effects.

There is obvious duplication of and alignment between the activities delivered by individual schools to achieve their three priority outcomes. As such, many of the enablers and barriers intersect with all aspects of the Project. They are also important to understand as they:

- enable a considered approach to the design and delivery of the Project in new schools and the enhancement of the Project within existing schools

- inform future decision making by the AISNSW and the Project funders

- facilitate suitable Project time frames and levels of resourcing.

I think we've made a lot of progress in a short amount of time, but obviously there's still a lot to do. So, the extension of the Project I think would be the obvious way that could happen. (Carinya Christian School – Tamworth)

6. A changing landscape

6.1 Impact of COVID-19 and approach for successful transition to online learning

COVID-19 was challenging for schools, students, and their families, both in terms of the transition to remote learning in 2022, and the cumulative impacts over the course of the pandemic. While there were difficulties, there were also considerable positive experiences. Schools, students, and their families took on the challenge of adapting to a changing landscape and did so with unwavering determination.

The adverse impacts and positive outcomes identified through this Evaluation relate to individual Project outcomes and comprise of several insights distinct from those anticipated through delivery of the Project. Although the situation was indeed a key barrier to progress, as evidenced in Chapter 4, achievement across the 10 outcomes was still outstanding. Further, as with the pilot evaluation, this Evaluation was also affected and needed to evolve with the changing situation. Nevertheless, due to the flexibility of the research team, AISNSW and schools themselves, the Evaluation still accomplished its intended depth.

Overall, transitioning to learning from home has been overwhelming and fatiguing. Despite this, staff, students, and families have demonstrated tremendous resilience. This was largely attributed to increased familiarity with online learning.

However, schools also noted the importance of strong relationships and open lines of communication with students' families. This enabled staff to work with families to support their students' learning engagement and wellbeing.

Staff demonstrated their agile adaptability and had to pivot their approach, repeatedly adapting curriculum delivery to suit changing circumstances. This dedication provided students with much-needed emotional support during a trying time.

COVID-19 is only one manifestation of a rapidly changing world. Hence, it is important to recognise the lessons that will better equip all stakeholders with the skills and capacity to respond to potential events of any kind. As such, the most saliant findings, and the associate learnings relate to:

- maintaining student engagement

- reconnecting with kin and culture

- a holistic approach to wellbeing and learning

Change is continually happening, sometimes it is slow and has occasionally been frustrating, [but] we are moving forward as a school (Taree Christian College)

6.2 Maintaining student engagement

6.2.1 Barrier to student engagement via remote learning

The continual transitions throughout 2021 saw many students struggling to remain engaged in their learning. Despite schools adopting adaptive approaches to remote learning, many (36%) reported students struggling to engage with their schoolwork. As a result, students fell behind in their learning. They also felt confronted and overwhelmed by online learning which, in addition to limited face-to-face support and a missing sense of community and belonging, created barriers to student engagement.

Students were resilient to the challenges of online learning, but inequalities relating to access to and familiarity with the internet and associated technologies impacted on learning outcomes and engagement. Schools identified digital inequality [17], a lack of face-to-face learning support, limited resources and insecure or overcrowded living situations as barriers to student learning engagement during learning from home. For some students online learning intensified mental health concerns as they were distanced from support networks. Despite these challenges, many students developed a degree of autonomy and agency that has transferred to other aspects of their school lives.

Strategies to overcome or mitigate these challenges implemented by schools:

- Ensuring internet access

- Providing laptops for each student

- Transitioning to paper-based learning packs

- Sending care packages for families in need

- Regular wellbeing check-ins by psychologists and/or cultural mentors

- Liaising with community Elders

- Cooking and delivering meals to families in need.

Feelings of shame and fear

Online learning was overwhelming for many students, with schools reporting instances of absenteeism and a lack of active participation in lessons. Focus groups discussed how students' feelings of shame regarding their living situations led to them to disengage, with many students leaving their cameras and microphones off during lessons. Some students were also afraid of judgment from their peers, with one student commenting that participating in online lessons was a "shame job" (Knox Grammar School). Feelings of shame and fear were further exacerbated by students' inexperience with online learning. Although, it is interesting to note that some schools reported students being more engaged in 2021 as opposed to 2020. This was largely due to students and schools learning from experiences in 2020 and implementing processes that supported a smoother transition to online learning.

Limited face-to-face support

The transition to online learning saw many students returning to regional and remote communities where there was limited face-to-face academic support. Where possible, schools hired local tutors to ensure that students remained engaged with their learning. However, this was generally not feasible with most schools providing online academic support. High student to staff ratios and increased staff workloads impacted staffs' ability to provide individualised support and monitor students' participation. Students were therefore required to take ownership of their learning which proved difficult for some in light of increased study loads, familial obligations, and overwhelming fatigue.

A missing sense of community and belonging

Repeat disruptions to students' learning made maintaining consistency and connection with students difficult for schools. Not only did this affect academic outcomes but also impacted students' sense of belonging and connection with their school, peers, and staff. In a year full of challenges, building and maintaining strong relationships was key to students remaining engaged with their learning. A strategy implemented by several schools to support and maintain relationships was through online yarning circles

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17 Refers to a disparity in access to and familiarity with the internet and associated technologies.

where students could reconnect with staff and their peers. This also provided staff with an opportunity to perform informal wellbeing check-ins and gauge how students were coping with online learning. However, for students with unstable internet connections, these online meetings were difficult and frustrating to attend.

> *…the sense of belonging and staying connected has been more important than ever and these children and their parents are so thankful and appreciative of the College and the time taken to build relationships with the students, teachers, parents, and community (Taree Christian College)*

Reconnecting with kin and culture

Extended periods of separation away from families was deeply distressing for students. Returning home provided many with the opportunity to reconnect with their families and community. For some students, online learning also afforded them the chance to reset after a stressful year and take time for self-care through activities such as fishing and walking on Country. Ensuring that students maintained a school/life balance was prioritised by many schools. For example, schools limited study loads and employed flexible study sessions. This ensured that students were able to fully participate in their homes and families. Schools emphasised the significance of students' connection to kin and culture and its direct relation to their wellbeing.

> *Although COVID was a disruption to the student's participation in school/boarding life – our students were happy to have spent the extra time at home with their family and around their community – there was particular change in some student's wellbeing, knowing that they were surrounded by their family support system. They had thrived in this environment and if anything, COVID had been a blessing in disguise for some of our students who had been struggling with their mental health. (Abbotsleigh)*

6.2.2 A holistic approach to wellbeing and learning

The interconnected nature of academic success and student wellbeing was remarked on by all schools, with many adopting a holistic, tailored approach to supporting students. This was vital during the past year which, as one school commented, has been "an unnatural and somewhat disconnected time" (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Engaging families was considered key to students' success, with schools implementing various strategies to achieve this. For example, most schools developed personalised learning plans for students to ensure that individual learning needs were catered for. This was often done in collaboration with students' families, who participated in identifying and developing strategies to address areas of concern. By engaging students' families, relationships were built and strengthened between them and staff. This allowed schools to better support students during learning from home periods as they understood the unique contexts of each student.

> *Having conversations with family on how to best support the students academically was important and I truly believe that not putting too much pressure of students and families was really important. Just being there to listen and support was an important aspect for providing wellbeing support. (Kinross Wolaroi School)*

Providing access to cultural mentors ensured that students were afforded culturally safe spaces where they could discuss how they were coping with learning from home. Cultural mentors reached out regularly to students and their families to discuss challenges and provide support. One school also engaged cultural mentors in community to take students on-Country where they were able to address their frustrations and anxieties (Knox Grammar School). Another worked with Elders who visited students' homes and worked with them and their families to support them during the transition back to on campus schooling (Calrossy Anglican School).

When he came back, from the day on-Country all of the anger and frustration was gone. He said he felt he was free and not caged in anymore. (Knox Grammar School – parent)

In addition to these, schools put in place the following activities to support students and their families:

- Online community events
- Online yarning circles
- Wellbeing packages

A deepened understanding of culture and context

It is counter intuitive, yet during a time of profound isolation, greater connections were forged between families and staff. Online learning gave staff more insight into the personal lives of students and allowed them to engage on a deeper level with parents and carers. During online lessons and community visits, staff were able to get to know students' families and vice versa. As staff's knowledge of students' intimate lives increased, their cultural awareness grew alongside.

One of the most lovely and unexpected outcomes of the transition to online learning has been the increased engagement of families in their children's learning. Many students' families typically had limited involvement in their children's day-to-day learning, with one school remarking that parents felt it wasn't their place to do so (Loreto Normanhurst). Despite the chaos of this past year, or perhaps because of it, families have become empowered to actively participate in their children's schooling.

The positives that came from Covid was connecting with families via Zoom and families being able to get a greater insight into their child's education. From this came the realisation that we can be connecting with remote families via Zoom any time. (The Scots College)

Supporting families and communities

The transition to learning from home was also challenging for students' families. In recognition of the increased burden placed on families during online learning periods, many schools provided access to support staff and cultural mentors. For example, one school hosted online meetings where parents could discuss challenges, share moments of pride, and provide mutual support (Knox Grammar School). Several schools also sent care packages containing learning resources and also cooked and delivered meals in an effort to minimise expenses for families. Activities such as these ensured that families were supported which in turn supported students.

[F]amilies felt both connected and supported culturally and had a chance to share their challenges and news of their children during lockdown. Some of the parents had never used zoom before so it was also an opportunity for the students to teach and support their parents with technology …. parents became more confident and very open …. about their circumstances and finding connections and support. (Knox Grammar School)

7. Cultivating success

7.1 Overview of enablers and barriers toward academic achievement

As shown across each of the outcome sections, their achievement and that of the Project as a whole is accomplished through a holistic response to change and academic achievement. Activities delivered through the Project may be seen as discreet, yet from a practical perspective they cannot be siloed and need to consider the enablers and barriers that either underpin or undermine success.

The only barrier distinct to those outlined in the pilot evaluation are the ongoing impacts that result from adverse issues such as racism, stigma, and shame. The mitigation of this is a deep and considered approach to leadership, cultural accountability, and cultural competency, which is expressed as a core enabler.

Staff turnover and the level and consistency of funding were expressed as problems, similar to the findings outlined in the pilot evaluation, with the latter likely mitigated through the Project's continuation beyond 2021. Similarly, the provision of additional guidance and support in the collection and ongoing use of data would enable staff in schools to even more effectively monitor impact and correlation of strategies to the improvement of students' academic and educational successes. Lastly, time pressures were raised but as a consideration, rather than an ongoing issue. The expansion of funding also likely mitigates the stress associated with time and transforms it into an opportunity and an enabler of success.

Therefore, in cultivating success schools need to undertake a considered process of reflection and planning in collaboration with Indigenous staff, students, their families, and communities. This approach should be informed by the enablers and barriers to progress outlined below with consideration to their relevance within a school's context.

7.2 Enablers

Engaged and commitment leadership

As expressed in Outcome 9, and in the pilot evaluation, an engaged leadership cohort seen as "driving change from the top" underpins the project's success and ensure the depth and sustainably of outcomes. In particular, they directly enable the whole of school integration and recognition of culture.

Leadership is also responsible for the appropriate delegation of the Project's coordination and accountability, which when done correctly, ensures a collective and wide-reaching approach, rather than it sitting with a single person or department.

Deep and considered approach to cultural competency

An ongoing investment and a diversity to learning opportunities

Cultural safety and belonging underpins the Project's progress towards individual outcomes, and it's overarching goal of Indigenous self-determination and a more socially just society. While cultural education is already recognised as the essential starting point in the Project's journey, there needs to be an ongoing investment and a diversity to learning opportunities. This includes formal training and opportunities for staff to engage with families, communities, and Indigenous staff. Cultural competency should also be acknowledged as a personal investment that staff need to make as part of their own learning journey, outside of formal training.

I think our own personal education… we need to address that as well. I think we need to learn more about the culture… because I know that it's hard to teach something if you don't know it… And it's hard to understand where families or students are coming from when you don't understand in a significant way the culture. I think that that's a real barrier… (Namoi Valley Christian School)

Superficial or less comprehensive cultural competency training

Further, superficial, or less comprehensive, cultural competency training can sometime compound the issue of racism as it instils a sense of confidence in staff to speak on culture with authority, without understanding the full extent of the issue or the impact on Indigenous students, staff, and people more broadly. As such, socio-political education and especially anti-racism training is seen as the next step.

I think it's kind of like a two-sided coin. There's a cultural element, and then there's also the socio-political element that I think is seriously lacking with staff… I think it can also be dangerous to culturally empower people who have no idea… I worry about, like, emboldening people, thinking that they then will have the right to talk about things and know things, but then go and be racist in the classroom and how that can feel like kids… yeah… I think it needs to have to two sides to it… so it's like a cycle of struggling to educate staff… (Barker College - Indigenous staff member)

Creating a data and measurement mindset

The collection and use of data and the measurement and reporting processes that a school has in place is seen as both an enabler and a barrier to success. It is also important to consider as the Project moves into its next phase, which facilitates consistency across existing schools, the design of Project's within new schools that will allow the AISNSW to undertake a longer-term / integrated evaluation.

The Framework provides schools with a focus for the planning and implementation of project activities, and guidance to which the staff to refer to. The outcomes are also specific and measurable.

However, there is often confusion as to what data to collect, in what way and how it can be used to the benefit of schools, staff and students alike. Evidence of which was the inconsistency seen across final reports.

Schools acknowledge that there needs to be an improvement in student data collection, forms that gather information from families, the structures, and processes to reliably store data and allow for its meaningful use.

If there's information that could help at a classroom level with helping the kids with their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, then that would be good to know that information. (St Catherine's School)

Some schools feel that there needs to be additional professional development for staff on both the value and potential uses of data, as well as the practical elements of collection and management. For example, while there is an understanding of the resources that funding can provide, such as through the Project, there is still a gap in terms of accountability with the view that "staff mindsets need to change".

We need to deliberately make sure that there is evidence to show the tangible improvements in a student's learning e.g., a photo. (Narromine Christian School).

There was also the view by some that academic benchmarks are unrealistic and not the most appropriate measure of a student's success. This aligns with the perspective of a large number of schools that measures of success should be holistic and look beyond just "raw marks", such as the measurement of wellbeing, or their achievement of longer-term aspirations such as their career trajectory post-school and continued relationship with the school community.

Some students just want somewhere to be safe or somewhere that may feel social or engage in sport, like it doesn't have to be – well, academic outcomes are important, but I feel like holistically we should be looking at, you know, what they want out of school. (Calrossy Anglican School)

8. Recommended strategies and Considerations for enhancement and expansion

This Evaluation sees the strategies provided below as key to the Project's enhancement and expansion, and the actions schools may consider when evaluating their existing approach, or in the design of the Project for those commencing their journey. These have been determined through a holistic view of the insights across all outcomes, as well as the those that relate to the collaborative approach, a changing landscape and the enablers and barriers to success.

Many of the actions align with the enablers outlined in the previous pilot evaluation and have been referenced to provide consistency and support ongoing measurement activities[18].

Table 4   Strategies and actions for a successful approach

Strategy	Action	Pilot
Enhance appropriate academic supports	Provide extra support for students in last years of primary school and first years of secondary school	
	Invest in tutoring and mentoring activities, seek advice from students if attendance is low or outcomes not being achieved	
	Allow classroom teachers to provide coaching and mentoring to students	
	Consider the emphasis on testing if creating excessive pressure on Indigenous students, or less frequent testing to measure progress over a longer timeframe	✓
	Engage literacy and numeracy specialists	
	Encourage and facilitate greater uptake of available supports	
Invest initial efforts in developing and embedding cultural competency	Start with reflection and involve the whole school to understand what they know about culture and how culturally safe the school environment is. This can be done internally, or with support from an external cultural consultant.	✓
	Determine if additional or a different approach to cultural competancy training and development is an appropriate use of Project funding, particularly in the early phase of delivery e.g., new schools.	

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[18] Barber, T & Netherton, C 2020, *Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: AISNSW Pilot Project Phase 2*, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology, Sydney, p13

Strategy	Action	Pilot
Invest in staff development and capacity building	Think of cultural competency and cultural training as a journey, it needs to get deeper as knowledge, skills and confidence grows e.g., cultural competency as a foundation, moving to culturally responsive pedagogy and training that focusses on socio-political learning.	✓
	Think outside the box of formalised training e.g., allow for staff to share learnings and cross-pollinate ideas at staff meetings.	
	Use Indigenous staff as guidance, but ensure it is part of their role and doesn't create the burden of cultural load.	
	Consider Stronger Smarter Leadership Program as a core inclusion in a school's Professional Development strategy.	
	Provide training that equips staff with the practical skills to increase their confidence to appropriately engage with students, families, and communities.	✓
Ensure that Indigenous people are well represented and accessible to students	Consider Indigenous staff and the engagement of external representative when undertaking Project planning and budget allocations, particulary where there is an ability to increase existing FTE's or recruit for additional staff *We have to look at employing more local Aboriginal people to get them working with their kids. (Casino High School)*	✓
	Engage a diversity of Indigenous role models and mentors, including those that can support students with learning, culture and wellbeing	
	Invite Indigenous guest speakers to school events that aren't just focussed on culture, and involve all students. For example, bring in an Indigenous professional to speak on their subject matter and life experieinces rather than explicity about culture.	
	Maintain relationships with school alumni and identify opportunties for them to play a role in supporting current students	
Centre the Indigenous perspective and experience	Utilise the knowledge Indigenous staff and external cultural liasons and the appropriate cultural authories to understand the diveristy of community protocals and sensitivies and those relevant for each student	
	Engage a diversity of Indigenous role models and mentors, including those that can support students with learning, culture and wellbeing	
	Invest in Indigenous literature, curriculum content, expand Indigenous specific subjects and the integration of culture into traditional subjects	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
Invest in enduring relationships and partnerships	Engage with people outside of a student's family unit and the school network and community, including Elders. *I think… if we can get more people visiting people out there, that will build the connections… (The Scots College)*	
	Establish reference groups with representatives from home and local communities, including Elders to: • have a touchpoint on situations and challenges that may affect how a child participates in school life • collectively identify solutions • codesign programs and activities. • gain the appropriate authority on the aspects of culture that can and should be incorporated into school life.	
	Maintain regular contact and engagement with families throughout a students journey	✓
Prioritise personalised student planning	Ensure that enrolment processes include the collection of cultural background information on students (e.g., through intake forms and interviews)	
	Create a structured transition program, and one that is prolonged (e.g., over a full school year) if required by an individual student	
	Focus on getting to know the student from the start of their schooling journey and provide opportunities for staff directly involved in their transition to build relationships early (e.g., rather than just through initial interviews)	
	Incorporate students' interests early so that they can be provided supports and opportunities aligned to their future study and career aspirations.	
	Encourage the active involement of classroom teachers in all aspects of student support e.g., ensure they are participating in meetings regarding a student's wellbeing not just accademic successes or challenges	
View the development of student's capabilities through a holistic lens	Prioritise social and emotional learning and wellbeing *They just lack that confidence to have a go. They just assume they're going to be wrong. So, if we can get them to a place where they assume they're going to be right rather than assuming they're going to be wrong, I think we'll just see much better growth rates. (Kempsey Adventist School)*	
	Build life skills in addition to academic learning e.g., managing time,	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
	budgeting, life outside the Boarding house.	
	Seek to understand and manage experiences and feelings common among Indigenous students e.g., shame and tall poppy syndrome *It goes right back to our culture… that if you become too smart, you are smart, you know… you get pulled back by the Elders as well, you know?... If you go out and you're more smarter than your parents… that's still there in the family background… but your parents rely on you for writing letters… so… it's a difficult one because… you can be pulled back. (Kempsey Adventist School - student)*	
	Expose students to a diversity of experiences and opportunities and expand their worldview	
	Cultivate leadership skills and independence	
	Foster critical thinking skills, self-directed learning, and initiative	
	Avoid imposing uniform expectations or Western definitions of success *At the end of the day, we're saying that we want them to be the best person they can be, and whatever job that is, whether it's a tradesperson or whether it's a lawyer… (Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview)*	
Institute a culture of data and measurement	Invest in a high-quality tool and upskill staff in its use and value e.g., educate staff on how to leverage data to provide more appropriate learning or wellbeing support	✓
	Ensure there is alignment between the overarching tool and those that are used to collect data e.g., a consistent suite of tools that support holistic and robust collection and useable outputs	
	Provide opportunities for staff to engage in professional dialogue and development in the use of data.	
	Ensure data collection tools and activities are wide reaching and test and measure progress beyond academic outcomes	
	Consider the appropriateness of standard benchmarks	
Widen the scope of cultural activities, celebrations and use of culture	Identify times in the school year where events and actitives can be delivered, rather than exclusively holding them during established celebration times.	
	Design and run a diversity of events and actitivites, or provide options for people to participate in different ways	
	Deliver cultural learning opportunities for the wider community, e.g.	

Strategy	Action	Pilot
	through hosting more public events	
	Use social media (e.g. Instagram and Facebook) and other contemporary communication methods to publicise cultural events and activities to help get *the message out to the broader community (Abbotsleigh).*	
	Where schools have multiple campuses ensure that events and activities are available to all students, families and staff. For example, ensure that primary aged students can participate in events, even if the Project is delivered within the secondary school.	

9. Conclusion

The Project has achieved overwhelming positive change and there is evidence of progress towards all ten outcomes. While only four years into delivery, the Project is already having a significant impact and making strides towards the long-term intended outcomes of:

- enhanced outcomes and experiences for Indigenous people

- increased respect and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and culture throughout the community

- increased Indigenous voice in community culture and decision-making.

The evolution of schools' commitment, knowledge, skills and relationships, and the outcomes experienced by students, has set a strong foundation within the existing schools to continue enhancing their approach and building on the success achieved to date. Broadly, across the collective and within each as individual entities, it can be said that the Project has enabled and empowered schools to create a "groundswell of change in short amount of time". Ultimately the Project has resulted in a noticeable difference in the cultural competency across both a whole of school environment and the wider community.

Moreover, many of the schools see the Project as one of the most exciting, important, and impactful funded Projects being delivered in the education system as a way of supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and contributing to broader societal change.

> *For a small school with a high percentage of Aboriginal students the Waratah Project has been the single most effective funding model I have ever encountered. (Wellington Christian School)*

The greatest take away from this Evaluation is that the approach of the AISNSW and the delivery of the Project within schools is working. Now is the time to extend and deepen activities and outcomes to mitigate and move beyond tokenism and tick-a-box approaches, ensure their sustainability, and embed Indigenous culture as "business as usual" in a school environment.

> *The curriculum is part of our role as teachers… but personally, I found the school life part of it, [culture has] been touched in so many different areas. And I know we've got the most value out of the enrichment activities… just opening [students] minds up to the possibilities, you know to ask questions, have conversations, it's embedded holistically. It's not just tokenistic curriculum. It's bigger than that. It's part of who we are as a community. And seeing the [students] and see everyone involved, like the Indigenous founders, who fought so many different things even in the beginning of the year. It feels really meaningful… (Pymble Ladies' College)*

Hence, the recent news of the Project's expansion, which was only received by schools several weeks before the end of the 2021 school year, is seen as the best possible decision by the funding body. The excitement and appreciation shown by schools also indicates the strength of their commitment, not only to their own students, their families, and the communities they interact with, but also the Project as a whole and all participating schools as a collective.

> *The news that the Waratah Project has been extended is exciting as we can plan more extensively and target further areas of development. (Knox Grammar School)*

Schools and their staff clearly have the desire and the drive to continue to grow and learn together, and students are genuine recipients of change. As such, this Evaluation finds that the Project is on its way to contributing to the intended impact of enhanced Indigenous self-determination and a more socially just society.

10. Method in detail

10.1 Project establishment

10.1.1 Planning and accountability

An Evaluation Plan was developed by Murawin using Project documentation, such as the Outcomes Framework and Pilot Evaluation report. It included detail on the Evaluation questions and objectives outlined in Section 4.4, and the data collection methods used to address these. The Plan guided the evaluation but was used as a "live" document to support flexibility.

AISNSW and the Murawin research team held regular fortnightly meetings throughout the Evaluation. These were used to build and maintain strong working relationships, collaboratively develop Evaluation materials and communications and plan for activities. This process ensured accountability to the Evaluation principles and enabled the Evaluation to continue delivery, regardless of the changing landscape.

10.1.2 Capacity-building

All participating schools were asked to facilitate a focus group with up to six staff.

To ensure staff had the skills, confidence, and appropriate resources they were provided with a comprehensive guidance document and participated in a full day workshop. The guidance document included a discussion guide and was instructional. It supported schools to facilitate the focus groups in a semi-structured manner to balance obtaining the requisite data and allowing participants to tell their own stories.

This built the capacity of schools and their staff, enabling them to actively contribute to this evaluation and enhance their future monitoring and reporting activities, both for the Project and others.

10.2 Data collection

10.2.1 Approach to the data collection

The predominant data sources used in the Evaluation were focus groups and school reports. The data was supplemented through participation in Project meetings, which were planned separate to the Evaluation and attended by participating schools. This mitigated some of the burden on schools, particularly due to increased pressured resulting from COVID-19. Ongoing collaboration with AISNSW ensured the appropriateness of Evaluation materials and communications, supported the evolution of data collection activities and contextualised emerging themes and findings.

Data underwent a testing and validation process that included cultural contextualisation by Murawin CEO Carol Vale and the facilitation of a workshop with participating schools.

10.2.2 Focus groups

The Evaluation included 31 focus groups. These were facilitated either by the schools with staff or by Murawin with students and Indigenous staff (teaching or non-teaching). All focus groups, except two were recorded and transcribed. In the instances where recording wasn't possible, detailed notes were taken.

School-led

Each of the 25 participating schools facilitated an in-person focus group with up to six teaching and non-teaching staff. These were conducted using the focus group guidance document and discussion guide provided during the capacity building workshop. Schools nominated a facilitator and were encouraged to

include a diversity of staff, both with and without direct involvement in the Project.

Murawin-led

Murawin facilitated four[19] online focus groups with the schools listed in the case study section below. These were attended by selected Indigenous students and Indigenous staff, both teaching and non-teaching, as well as the Project coordinator in each school. Discussion guides were developed by Murawin and reviewed by AISNSW. Each school then participated in a planning discussion to contextualise their discussion guide and ensure the language, questions and framing were student appropriate. Focus groups were conducted in a culturally safe and appropriate manner and consent obtained from parents and/or guardians.

10.2.3 School reports

All participating schools provided high-level interim reports at the end of the second term of 2021, using a reporting template created by Murawin and AISNSW. AISNSW undertook the analysis and provided Murawin with an overview of outcomes and gaps in Project design and delivery, which was used to develop the focus group discussion guides, final reporting template and associated guidance document.

Final school reports were provided by all participating schools. They included detail on:

- Priority areas and overarching project description.

- Progress in 2021 towards the each of their priority areas[20].

    o Project strategies and activities (what has been implemented?)

    o Evidence of progress towards achieving outcomes (what changes have resulted from implemented activities?)

- Project reflections throughout the evaluation period.

    o Reflections on the network model, using the Partnership Continuum as a tool to assess the relationship between the schools within their network.

- Strategies and activities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students during the 2021 Learning from Home.

    o Project's progress and achievements during the Learning from Home period for 2021:

        – specific support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to continue engagement while Learning from Home

        – project strategies that were modified due to COVID restrictions

        – wellbeing, mental health, and cultural strategies.

    o What worked well and what were the challenges?

    o How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students responded to learning from home this year? (Consider level of engagement and wellbeing in comparison to 2020).

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[19] Six focus groups were planned but only four conducted due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19

[20] All participating schools are required to have outcome 1 as a priority area, with an additional two based on an environmental scan conducted when they commence delivery of the Project in their school.

- Reflections or comments on the overall impact of COVID on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- School program or project case study (optional).

10.2.4 Case studies

The evaluation includes case studies of six schools selected to represent the diversity of school contexts, with a view to achieving a balanced mix of:

- urban and regional schools
- pilot and Project schools
- day and boarding schools
- priority focus areas (with specific reference to the Outcomes Framework).

Case study data collection included the four focus groups previously discussed, as well as a deep dive into school reports and additional discussions with teachers and school staff. The case study approach enabled the research team delved deeper into the design and delivery of the Project within these schools in order to understand student's perspective and experience. It was intended that these case studies would accompany the report as discreet deliverables. However, as the project evolved, it became clear that the data from the insights enriched the collective findings and were more appropriate to use as a supplementary data source. As such, these have been integrated into the report.

Table 5   Case study schools

School	Focus group	Regional status	Indigenous students	Indigenous staff	Pilot school	Waratah school	Day school	Boarding school	Initial Priorities	Final Priorities
Pymble Ladies' College	✓	Urban	1%	2.9%	✓			✓	1 7 9	1 7 9
St Andrew's Cathedral School - Gawura	✓	Urban	7.8%	3.0%		✓	✓		1 6 9	1 6 9
Kinross Wolaroi School	✓	Regional	2.2%	3.5%		✓		✓	1 6 7	1 6 10
Macleay Vocational College		Regional	72.4%	27%	✓		✓		1	1 6 7

Kempsey Adventist School		Regional	23.5%	13.3%	✓		✓		1 4	1 4 9
Taree Christian College	✓	Regional	3.7%	3.6%		✓	✓		1 5 6	1 5 6

10.3 Data analysis

10.3.1 Focus group data

Coding was undertaken using both deductive and inductive methodologies. This meant that the initial coding framework was high-level and developed using the Framework and Evaluation questions, and objectives as a basis (deductive). Second and third tier codes were then identified using emerging themes and coded accordingly (inductive).

Focus groups (multiple participants) were coded and analysed as a unique case file (n=1), rather than segmenting individual contributions within a focus group. This was determined as the most appropriate method as the collective discussion that occurs in focus groups often results in emergent dialogic data, which is the way participants tend to speak to and build on other participants contributions.

The approach to coding supported a thematic analysis, strengthened by the following methodologies:

- **Discourse analysis** to identify and understand the experiences of staff and students in relation to the Project. This approach enabled the recognition of context, including the day-to-day school and learning from home environment.

- **Grounded theory** supported an examination of the data set as a whole and the comparison experiences and perspectives across similar and divergent insights and attributes. This allowed the qualitative data to explain the "why" and in turn enabled causal explanations and associations.

The approach to coding and analysis ensured it was undertaken with an "open mind" and allowed themes to emerge, rather than making assumptions as to the potential insights that could arise. It also supported a rich and detailed understanding of participants perspectives and experiences.

The final analysis was reviewed and contextualised by Carol Vale, to ensure a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous experiences.

10.3.2 School reports

Murawin developed an excel spreadsheet using the final report template, which was then populated on receipt of the final reports from all 25 schools. Murawin categorised the content using priority areas and creating consistent activity and outcome descriptors, augmented with school specific evidence and narratives. A thematic analysis was then undertaken to extract key themes and relationality across schools and networks.

School reports inherently generate "what" answers, whereas focus group data provides the "why" answers. Involvement of schools and collaboration with AISNSW then contextualised and explained emerging themes for the accurate representation of findings.

Data was integrated to verify findings through a side-by-side comparison and to deepen the understanding of the factors that underpin or undermine success. Where possible, cross tabulation was used to identify associations and determine causality. Limitations with causality are expressed in the following section.

10.3.3 Testing and validation

Murawin presented the emerging findings, insights, patterns and themes from the focus group data at a workshop. It was intended to also use final report data. However, due to a shift in timelines this wasn't possible.

The purpose of this workshop was to test and validate the tentative analyses and findings, sense check their initial framing and provide an opportunity for schools to guarantee accuracy. It also provided the opportunity for schools to see the tangible results of the contribution and close the "feedback loop".

Data was presented in two ways, as a single set showing relationality across the 10 outcomes and contributing activities, and the key findings associated with the hub and spoke model. Participants were asked to consider and provide responses to the following questions:

- **A holistic response**

    o   What were the greatest learnings?

       –   which activity/initiative does it align to?

       –   what would you have changed in the early stages of design and development?

    o   When thinking about future planning for your school and new schools, do any of the activities and initiatives naturally group together for a holistic response?

    o   What are the priority activities and initiatives for new schools?

       –   what should occur further down the track (e.g., based on a four-year project delivery)?

- **A collaborative approach**

    o   What is the key activity that supports each outcome? (Connections and relationships, collective change, learning and development and new ideas)

    o   How can the hub and spoke model be further enhanced for current and future schools?

10.4 Research limitations and considerations

10.4.1 Variable quality of focus group discussions.

The guidance document and capacity building workshop were intended to ensure focus groups were conducted to a high standard and gathered the requisite data. While the result could not be controlled by the research team, a subsequent review and analysis of the data proved this approach to be effective

10.4.2 Impacts due to COVID-19

Unfortunately, the Project coincided with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in significant and ongoing restrictions imposed across NSW and severely impacted all aspects of school life including schools' capacity to participate in Evaluation activities. The research team adapted their approach accordingly and maintained flexibility to the changing environment. This included flexibility to due dates of reports, use of existing Project meetings, rather than arranging additional workshops and the transition of Murawin focus groups from face-to-face to online. While some of the activities would have been better conducted in person, all Evaluation activities were conducted and data collection seemingly unaffected to any major extent.

10.4.3 Challenges with causality and attribution of outcomes

It was deemed unnecessary and not possible to undertake a statistical measurement of the relationships between the variables. As such, causal attribution was determined through observed or expressed changes and the integration of data sets.

10.4.4 Limited view of the system and other contributing factors

The evaluation was conducted using a "realist" approach. As such, the Framework provided the theory and data identified what works, for whom, how, to what extent and in what context. The hub and spoke model allowed for somewhat of a systems level view. However, outcomes were generally mapped to the activities undertaken through delivery of the Project, with limited consideration to external factors.

References

Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*, viewed 10 December 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/indigenous-education/resources/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy-2015>.

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Craven, R., Ryan, R., Mooney, J., Vallerand, R., Dillon, A., Blacklock, F. & Magson, N. 2016, 'Towards a positive psychology of Indigenous thriving and reciprocal research partnership model', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, vol. 47, pp. 32-43.

Appendix A: Glossary of key terms

Student: refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, non-Indigenous students are referred to as such.

Staff: refers to the collective of school staff both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous

Families: refers to the parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Community: refers to Indigenous communities, both the home community of a student and that local to the school.

Personalised Learning Plan: a plan developed through a consultation process involving the student, parent/carer and teachers that articulates the student's individual short and long-term goals and processes/actions for achieving goals. The plan (sometimes referred to as a profile or pathway) should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the student's ongoing development.

School life: is the all-encompassing experience of students, staff, families, and communities in a school environment.

Appendix B: Participating school's summary

Table 6 Summary of participating schools as of December 2021

School	Categories					Student enrolments	Indigenous students	% Indigenous students	No. teaching staff	No. Indigenous staff
	1	2	3	4	5					
Abbotsleigh	3	2	1	1	2	1581	13	0.8%	308	2
Barker College	2	2	1	1	1	2614	17	0.7%	501	2
Calrossy Anglican School	2	2	2	1	1	651	192	29.5%	65	6
Canberra Grammar School	2	2	1	1	1	1202	17	1.4%	163	1
Carinya Christian School - Tamworth	3	2	2	2	1	745	87	11.7%	71	2
Casino Christian School	2	2	2	2	1	253	28	11.1%	24	1
Casino High School	2	2	3	2	1	656	92	14%	51	2
Kempsey Adventist School	1	2	2	2	1	587	138	23.5%	45	6
Kinross Wolaroi School	2	2	2	1	1	1094	24	2.2%	85	3
Knox Grammar School	2	2	1	1	3	3172	15	0.5%	298	0
Loreto Normanhurst	2	2	1	1	2	1108	15	1.4%	117	1
Macleay Vocational College	3	2	2	2	1	134	97	72.4%	74	20
Macquarie Anglican Grammar School	2	2	2	1	1	513	39	7.6%	43	1

School	Categories					Student enrolments	Indigenous students	% Indigenous students	No. teaching staff	No. Indigenous staff
	1	2	3	4	5					
Namoi Valley Christian College	3	1	2	2	1	56	17	30.4%	7	1
Narromine Christian School	3	2	2	2	1	138	46	33.3%	12	0
New England Girls' School	3	2	2	1	2	986	46	4.7%	62	1
Pymble Ladies' College	1	2	1	1	2	2260	22	1.0%	242	7
Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview	1	2	1	1	3	1582	31	1.9%	185	2
The Scots College	2	2	1	1	3	1285	18	1.4%	139	2
Sydney Church of England Grammar School	2	2	1	1	3	1292	13	1.0%	135	1
St Andrew's Cathedral School	3	1	1	2	1	270	21	7.8%	330	10
St Catherine's School	3	2	1	1	2	1000	13	1.3%	200	0
St Joseph's College – Hunters Hill	1	2	1	1	3	1100	40	3.6%	120	3
Taree Christian College	2	1	2	2	1	1470	55	3.7%	250	9
Wellington Christian School	3	2	2	2	1	70	29	41.4%	8	1
Total						25819	1125	4.35%	3535	84

Table 7 Schools summary legend

Schools' summary legend			
1. Waratah Project Stage	Phase 1 Waratah Schools	1	
	Phase 2 Waratah Schools	2	
	Pilot Schools	3	
2. School Level	Primary School Program	1	
	Secondary School Program	2	
3. Geography & School Type	Metro Independent	1	
	Regional Independent	2	
	Regional Government	3	
4. Service Type	Boarding Schools	1	
	Day Schools	2	
5. Gender	Co-educational	1	
	All Girls	2	
	All Boys	3	

Murawin team contribution to this project and report:

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- Loma Cuevas-Hewitt, Senior Consultant, Evaluation and Research
- Dr Rieko Fukushima Byrom, Senior Consultant, Evaluation and Research Lead
- Sophia Anagnostaras, Senior Consultant, Evaluation and Research
- Terri Lethlean, Consultant, Evaluation and Research
- Halena Scanlon, Graduate Consultant
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