

Improving outcomes
for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
students:
AISNSW Pilot Project
Phase 2

Final project report
August 2020

External evaluation of Phase 2 of the *AISNSW Pilot Project: Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* was undertaken on behalf of the Association of Independent Schools NSW by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney.

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In this report, the term Indigenous is respectfully used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AIEF	Australian Indigenous Education Foundation
AISNSW	Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience
CBRS	Connors Comprehensive Behaviours Rating Scales
DIBELS	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
LFIN	Learning Framework in Number
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
PAT	Progressive Achievement Tests
PBL	Project Based Learning
PLP	Personalised Learning Plan
PCYC	Police Citizens Youth Club
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
SAST	South Australian Spelling Test
UAC	Universities Admission Centre
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
WARP	Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages
WISC	Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children
WRMT	Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests
YARC	York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension

Glossary of key terms

Culturally responsive pedagogy – a pedagogical approach that values and draws upon students’ cultural knowledge and prior experiences to provide relevant learning experiences.

Eight Aboriginal Ways of Learning – eight interconnected pedagogies that conceptualise learning as holistic, non-linear, visual, kinaesthetic, social, and contextualised.

Explicit teaching – drawing the learner’s attention to the key elements of the learning task through clear articulation of learning objectives, explanations and demonstrations of required tasks and constructive individual feedback.

First Nations people – a term referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which draws attention to the different groups of Indigenous peoples inhabiting Australia pre-colonisation, with their own specific languages and cultural practices. The usual term used in NSW is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

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.

Project Based Learning – a pedagogical model that emphasises active learning and the integration of knowing and doing, through the teacher facilitating learning situations that engage students in investigating and responding to real-world issues and problems over extended periods of time.

School culture – refers to the constantly evolving conscious and unconscious values, perceptions and attitudes within the school and the relationships, interactions, systems, and practices that occur within this context. The school’s students, parents/family, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school’s culture, which is based within and influenced by its local community, education policies and structures, and wider society.

Executive summary

Context and background

In 2016 the Association of Independent Schools NSW initiated a two-year pilot project in four independent schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: the *Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students pilot project (Phase 1)*. The project's goals were 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 strengthen relationships with their families and communities.

AISNSW recognised in Phase 1 of the project that thorough and comprehensive evaluation was critical to maximising project impact and ensuring learnings were shared across the sector. To this end the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney, was engaged to undertake external evaluation of Phase 1. Evaluation of this first phase indicated improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy and numeracy outcomes, and in other academic outcomes including increased student engagement and confidence in learning, improved self-management and increased student aspiration for school and further education success. While schools varied in their approaches, the evaluation identified nine key strategies schools had adopted that collectively provided a holistic framework for supporting student wellbeing and academic development. The strategies involved building strong relationships with the student, family and community, and providing culturally sensitive and individualised academic, personal, spiritual, social and physical support, from pre-commencement, through to transition out of school.

Based on the success and learnings from the first phase of the pilot project AISNSW commenced Phase 2 in May 2019. The 12-month project extended project schools from four to 16, involving 12 boarding schools and four days schools, one of which was a state school. Four schools were situated in rural New South Wales and 12 in urban areas (11 in Sydney and one in the Australian Capital Territory). A key feature of Phase 2 was the organisation of the 16 schools into four networks of four schools, in each of which a Phase 1 school acted as a hub to support and mentor three spoke schools.

Unfortunately, the second phase 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. Schools understandably modified and, in some cases, paused 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 period cut-off date for Phase 2 would be set at 24 March 2020, at which point students across NSW were formally transferred to remote and online learning from home.

This report therefore provides the final evaluation findings for Phase 2 of the pilot project up to 24 March 2020, with the exception of the incorporation of evidence from literacy and numeracy assessments in Term 2 2020. Evaluation of schools' responses to supporting their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students during COVID-19 will be provided in a separate report.

Project evaluation: the participatory evaluation approach and development of the Waratah Outcomes Framework

The Jumbunna Institute continued in the evaluation role for Phase 2, with the External Evaluation Team drawing upon the core principles of Indigenous Research Methodologies and instigating a participatory evaluation model. This included working with the project schools and AISNSW to build school capacity in undertaking evaluation and co-designing 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 10 high level outcomes comprised of five student outcomes, two stakeholder relationship outcomes, two staff outcomes and one whole-of-school outcome. 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. Table 1 details the Framework outcomes.

Table 1. The Waratah Outcomes Framework

Outcomes
<i>Improved academic and other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</i>
1. Students have improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes
2. Students experience a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment
3. Students have increased aspiration 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
<i>Strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders</i>
6. Relationships between school, family and community are strengthened and culturally informed
7. Relationships between staff and students are strengthened and culturally informed
<i>Engaged, supportive and culturally competent school staff</i>
8. Staff have the knowledge, skills and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices
9. School leadership are engaged, supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
<i>Whole-of-school integration of Indigenous culture</i>
10. Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life

The Evaluation Team initially planned to implement a mixed methods model to explore schools' progress across the ten intended outcomes, including collecting qualitative and quantitative data through:

- Evaluation reports from project schools that would provide both qualitative and quantitative data
- A visit to each project school to undertake focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' family and community members, and interviews with key project staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic restricted the possibility of visiting the project schools to undertake the student focus groups or family/community focus groups in March 2020 as planned. The project staff interviews did proceed and were conducted by either telephone or Zoom technology. While it was not possible to meet with students or family members, it was fortunate that the participatory evaluation approach supported schools in collecting a wide range of data, enabling the External Evaluation Team to draw through the schools' reports on direct feedback from students and family and incorporate this information into the evaluation findings.

Project schools' priorities

Before commencing project activities schools identified which areas of the Waratah Outcomes Framework they intended to focus upon. As well as the high priority focus on academic outcomes, more than half of participating schools prioritised strengthened connection to and pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage, strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, family and community, support for a positive and successful transition experience for Indigenous students into the school and boarding environment, and whole-of-school acknowledgement, valuing and integration of Indigenous culture.

Key findings

The evaluation evidence indicated that the strategies, programs and activities targeting students' academic and other outcomes, engagement of and relationship building with family and community, and whole-school acknowledgement and integration of Indigenous culture into school life yielded significant results within the project time frame.

Project reach

A total of 649 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were engaged through project activities, of whom 79 per cent (n=515) were secondary school students and 21 per cent (n=134) primary school students. The project also engaged 27 Indigenous staff, 562 parents and carers of Indigenous students, and local and non-local Indigenous community members. Other target groups engaged were school teachers (n=1360), school leaders (n=124), other school staff (n=1257), non-Indigenous students (n=12 580) and non-Indigenous community members.

Progress towards improving academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

All schools prioritised improving Indigenous students' literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes. They approached this through providing individualised learning support developed in collaboration with students, family members and carers and a wide range of specialist staff. Personalised Learning Plans, specialised literacy and numeracy programs and targeted literacy and numeracy support in and outside of class time were widely used. Throughout Phase 2 schools

provided evidence of improvements in student literacy and numeracy, including significant positive growth in literacy for Indigenous students overall and for Indigenous boys, and in numeracy for Indigenous girls. Increased student engagement in learning was reported including enhanced interest, motivation, commitment, effort, enjoyment in learning and participation in class. Students exhibited greater academic preparedness including in self-management skills, study skills and time management, and increased confidence in their learning and the school environment.

Progress towards other educational, sociocultural and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

In addition to literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes, project schools demonstrated progress towards other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A focus for many project schools was improving students' transition experiences into the school and boarding environment, with schools implementing a wide range of transition programs and activities. These included school staff visits to students' home school, family and community prior to commencement, student and family visits to the school, Orientation events, regular communication and support to families and the completion of student profiles and learning plans. These contributed to increased confidence and trust in school staff and Indigenous students feeling a stronger sense of connection with peers and belonging in the school and boarding environment.

A small number of schools also focused on supporting students' transition out of school to future education and employment opportunities through providing information and support and connecting students with education and employment providers. Schools reported increased students' awareness of and aspirations and expectations towards further education and employment.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to develop a sense of identity and pride in their culture and heritage was at the heart of all project schools' strategies to strengthen students' connection to their Indigenous culture. Project teams reported the importance of taking more intentional steps to build connection to culture for students, for example through opportunities to learn about, experience and display confidence in traditional practices and languages, both within and outside of the school community and by introducing explicit programmes around building wellbeing and honouring culture in visible ways around the school. Many examples were provided across the project schools of students' increased awareness of and pride in their culture and heritage.

Many schools highlighted the connections between progress towards these student outcomes and improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Schools also implemented targeted support for Indigenous student health and wellbeing including appointments with school-based and external health professionals such as counsellors, child psychologists, dentists, optometrists, dieticians, and paediatricians.

Progress towards strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders

Project schools recognised that open and effective communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families was critical from enrolment and throughout each student's journey through school and beyond graduation. Working towards strengthened and culturally informed relationships was thus a priority area for most schools in Phase 2. Project teams provided feedback on improved relationships with parents following sustained efforts to increase the level of communication from the school, and increased involvement of family and community in student

learning and school decision-making processes. Several schools reported significant positive outcomes for school, family and community relationships associated with ‘on-Country’ visits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ home communities. Nearly 70 per cent of schools reported progress in relationships between school, family, and community, and 25 per cent reported progress specific to relationships between staff and students. There were many emerging connections between school, family and community indicating the potential for further development as the schools continue their work to deepen trust and cultural understanding between staff, students, family and community.

Progress towards engaged, supportive and culturally competent school staff

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires the capacity and commitment of school staff, leadership, and the school as a whole. All project schools shared progress on building staff capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through increased knowledge skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices. In some schools, investment in and support for learning and development opportunities to increase staff capacity was reported as a reflection of school leadership engagement in the project and the commitment of school leaders to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Whole-of-school integration of Indigenous culture

Progress to integrate Indigenous culture across the whole school was reported by most project schools, with evidence of increased acknowledgement and awareness of Indigenous culture, and efforts to embed Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum and school life. This ranged from acknowledgement and celebration of Indigenous culture at school-wide events to whole-of-school pedagogical change. Project teams observed connections between progress in this and other outcome areas, resulting in a positive feedback loop whereby integration of Indigenous culture throughout the school contributed to improved outcomes for Indigenous students, families and staff, and consequently led to further cultural change across the entire school community.

Detailed description and analysis of project schools’ strategies and activities is provided in sections 4 – 7 of this report, and further information is provided in Appendix 1 (School descriptions and project summaries) and Appendix 2 (School case studies).

Enablers and constraints

Enablers

The key enablers of progress in Phase 2 aligned closely with those identified in Phase 1, with the second phase evaluation providing more extensive evidence of the important role of these enablers and the ways in which they facilitate project implementation and change. Key enablers were:

- Indigenous staff, with most schools referencing the necessity of employing Indigenous staff and describing the critical role they played in supporting all student-specific project outcomes, as well as in developing family and community relationships, progressing staff’s cultural awareness and capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy, and achieving whole school change in valuing and integrating Indigenous knowledge into the school culture and school life

- Whole school collaboration and responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education and wellbeing
- Additional project funding to resource project activities and provide additional resources
- Having a defined school project that raised staff awareness and provided the catalyst for initiating and implementing activities
- Increased collection and use of student data to inform targeted student learning support
- School leadership who were overtly committed to the project, through direct involvement, support and advocacy for the project, and demonstrated trust in project leaders to make good decisions
- Staff professional learning which was instrumental to staff building strong relationships with, and implementing culturally responsive practices for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and contributing to their capacity to integrate Indigenous culture and perspectives in the curriculum and school life
- The school hub and spoke network model, including the guidance and direction provided by hub schools to spoke schools, and as a mechanism for sharing and generating ideas and resources, and supporting the design and implementation of schools' projects.

Constraints

The evaluation findings also demonstrated continuity across the two project phases in constraints upon implementation. The main, overarching constraint related to time pressures, including time required to implement project activities, build meaningful relationships with family and community, time to meet with other schools in the hub and spoke network, and time to fulfill other project commitments such as attending network meetings and completing reporting. Other challenges were staff coordination, staff turnover, limited funding and using student data effectively. These are likely to continue to present challenges into the future and knowing about these beforehand could potentially support schools in developing mitigation strategies. The enablers and challenges above can contribute to informing future decision making by project funders regarding setting realistic project time frames and levels of resourcing.

The following recommendations are proposed based on key learnings from Phase 2.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Schools should continue to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with individualised and targeted academic support, which is informed by timely and accurate student data in addition to consultation with students and families.

Recommendation 2

Schools should adopt a holistic model for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes that recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of students' academic, social, spiritual, emotional, physical, and cultural development.

Recommendation 3

Schools should prioritise employing Indigenous staff in both Indigenous and non Indigenous-specific positions, and schools in the independent sector should work together to identify and understand the challenges experienced by Indigenous staff and ways to support them in their school roles.

Recommendation 4

Schools should devote time and long-term commitment to nurturing culturally informed relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families and communities, and between these students and staff. This should be a priority from the outset of any program to improve these students' academic and other outcomes.

Recommendation 5

Schools should be encouraged to extend responsibility for improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to the whole school community and fostering the active engagement of the community.

Recommendation 6

The school network model should continue to be offered to schools in future projects and associated activities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students' outcomes. This includes school networks within the independent school sector and with the public and Catholic school sectors.

Recommendation 7

Schools would benefit from and should be provided with opportunities for ongoing professional learning about Indigenous pedagogy and education evaluation, including identifying student data sources, developing measures of progress, and analysing qualitative and quantitative student data.

Recommendation 8

Schools should be encouraged to and supported in utilising a project model approach for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic and other outcomes.

Recommendation 9

Mechanisms should be provided for supporting schools to identify and manage challenges associated with implementing Indigenous education projects both before and during project implementation. This could include support to schools in establishing cross-school networks.

Recommendation 10

Schools' capacity to continue to improve outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would benefit from the investment of continued funding directed towards this critical area.

Opportunities and next steps

Evaluation evidence indicates that Phase 2 strategies and activities were effective in achieving improvements in the project time period, and also laid the groundwork across the schools to build on into the future so that they can continue their efforts to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes. A key element of this was the commitment, dedication and determination of project and other staff to achieving positive change for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Their growing awareness and insights into providing culturally responsive pedagogy and embedding Indigenous knowledge and culture in curriculum and school life will continue to contribute to improving the opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed.

There is great scope to deepen and extend the beneficial relationships and collaborations initiated through the pilot project. This includes relationships within each of the school communities between school staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families and communities. It also includes the relationships and collaborations developed between the schools through the school network model, with the support of AISNSW. It is suggested that ongoing school resourcing within a school network model would consolidate and build upon the gains to date in existing project schools, as well as providing the knowledge base and infrastructure to extend the project to incorporate other schools.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

The AISNSW pilot project *Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* was initiated in 2016, with a focus on improving students' literacy and numeracy outcomes through quality teaching and quality learning and strengthening relationships with students' families and communities. The pilot project's goals were underpinned by the priorities of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*¹.

The intent and approach of the pilot project aimed to address the ongoing, interrelated sociohistorical, political and economic factors that continue to negatively influence the school experiences and academic outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is an increasingly extensive literature base providing awareness and understanding of these factors and how they contribute to Indigenous education inequalities, as well as strategies for addressing them². There has also over the last decade been targeted and strategic policy development and implementation by Commonwealth, state and territory governments specifically addressing these inequalities. This has led to some improvements, including in the share of Indigenous students at or above national minimum standards in reading and numeracy and Year 12 attainment rate. However the *Closing the Gap* target to halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018 has not been met and in 2018 around one in four Indigenous students in Years 5, 7 and 9, and one in five in Year 3, remained below national minimum standards in reading, with between 17 to 19 per cent of Indigenous students below the national minimum standards in numeracy³. In NSW

¹ Australian Government Department of Education and Training. *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, <https://www.education.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy>

² See for example: Biddle, N. (2014). *Developing a behavioural model of school attendance: policy implications for Indigenous children and youth (Working Paper 94)*. Accessed 19 August 2020, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/24100/2/WP_94_Biddle_Nicholas_DevelopingABehaviouralModel.pdf; Bodkin-Andrews, G., O'Rourke, V., Dillon, A., Craven, R. G., & Yeung, A. S. (2012). Engaging the disengaged? A longitudinal analysis of the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students' academic self-concept and disengagement. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 11, 179-195; Guenther, J., Disbray, S., & Osborne, S. (2015). Building on 'Red Dirt' Perspectives: What Counts as important for Remote Education? *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 44(2), 194 -206; Patrick, R., & Moodie, N. (2016). Indigenous education policy discourses in Australia: Rethinking the problem. In T. Barkatsas & A. Bertram (Eds.), *Global Learning in the 21st Century*, 165-184. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers; Stone, A., Walter, M. & Peacock, H. (2017). Educational outcomes for Aboriginal school students in Tasmania: Is the achievement gap closing? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27 (3), 90-110. Accessed 12 August 2020, <https://www.journal.spera.asn.au/index.php/AIJRE/article/view/148>; Trudgett, M., Page, S., Bodkin-Andrews, G., Franklin, C., & Whittaker, A. (2017). Another brick in the wall? Parent perceptions of school educational experiences of Indigenous Australian children. In M. Walter, K. L. Martin & G. Bodkin-Andrews (Eds.), *Indigenous Children Growing Up Strong: A Longitudinal Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families*, 233-254. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Vass, G. (2018). 'Aboriginal Learning Style' and culturally responsive schooling: Entangled, entangling, and the possibilities of getting disentangled. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43 (8). Accessed 11 August 2020, <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol43/iss8/6>

³ Australian Government, *Closing the Gap Report 2020*, 45-46, 58. Accessed 10 August 2020, <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdf/closing-the-gap-report-2020.pdf>

none of the *Closing the Gap* literacy and numeracy targets for Years 3, 5, 7 or 9 were met in 2018⁴. It is widely acknowledged that more needs to be done to address these inequalities⁵.

The pilot project was divided into two phases, with the first two-year phase concluding in 2018, and based on evaluation evidence demonstrating its effectiveness, a second one-year phase commencing in May 2019. Unfortunately, the second phase coincided with the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, which severely impacted all aspects of school life including schools' capacity to implement and evaluate project activities. Due to this situation it was decided to set the evaluation period cut-off date for Phase 2 to 24 March 2020, at which point students across NSW were formally transferred to remote and online learning from home. This report therefore provides the final evaluation findings for Phase 2 of the pilot project up to 24 March 2020, with the notable exception of repeated measures data from literacy and numeracy assessments in Term 2 2020.

1.2 Background - Phase 1

1.2.1 Phase 1 project structure and schools

Four schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students participated in Phase 1: Kempsey Adventist School; Pymble Ladies' College; Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, and Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. The schools identified specific strategies to enhance the literacy, numeracy and other academic achievements of their Indigenous students within the two-year project period, through a focus on providing quality teaching and quality learning, academic support, pastoral care, and engaging with and deepening understanding of Indigenous cultures. While there were common approaches across the four project schools, their projects reflected and responded to their unique circumstances and what was most appropriate for their students.

In initiating the project AISNSW recognised that undertaking thorough and comprehensive evaluation of Phase 1 was critical to maximising the impact of the project, through capturing and sharing learnings from the four schools across the sector. To this end evaluation was integral to project structure. Project schools were required to include evaluation in their project design and implementation, and the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney, was engaged to undertake external evaluation to determine what strategies had been implemented, their effectiveness in improving students' outcomes, and the potential to scale up project initiatives.

AISNSW and Jumbunna worked collaboratively to lay the foundations for a participatory evaluation model that would support learning during project implementation as well as provide summative findings at the project's conclusion.

1.2.2 Phase 1 key evaluation findings and recommendations

Phase 1 evaluation indicated that the schools demonstrated improvements in Indigenous students' literacy and numeracy outcomes within the project time frame, as well as improving other

⁴ Australian Government, *Closing the Gap Report 2020*, 49. Accessed 10 August 2020, <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdf/closing-the-gap-report-2020.pdf>

⁵ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Media Release of NAPLAN National Report, 25 February 2020*. Accessed 10 August 2020, <https://acara.edu.au/docs/default-source/Media-Releases/naplan-2019-national-report-media-release.pdf>

academic-related outcomes including increased student engagement with learning, increased confidence in their own learning abilities, improved self-management and increased student aspiration for school and further education success⁶.

How the schools achieved these outcomes varied according to their context and school community, yet there were common identifiable strategies. A central, critical theme across all schools was that improving academic outcomes required a holistic understanding of and responsiveness to students' capabilities and needs. This involves acknowledging and responding to the interdependence of teaching and learning with cultural identity, physical, spiritual and mental health, and family and community. These findings aligned with previous research regarding the holistic qualities of an Indigenous Australian world view involving connection across several domains of wellbeing⁷.

Phase 1 identified nine key strategies the schools had adopted that collectively provided this holistic framework for supporting student wellbeing and academic development. The strategies involved building strong relationships with the student, family and community, and providing culturally sensitive and individualised academic, personal, spiritual, social and physical support, from pre-commencement, through to transition out of the school.

As well as improving students' academic outcomes this holistic approach lead to other significant changes that positively impacted upon Indigenous students' overall wellbeing including improvements in schools' communication and relationships with students' families and communities, strengthened student-teacher relationships, and wider cultural changes in the school environment to acknowledging and valuing Indigenous culture and integrating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum and school life.

Enablers and challenges in Phase 1

Phase 1 evaluation identified the following key common enablers across the school for successful strategy implementation:

- authentic involvement of Indigenous community and commitment to listening to Indigenous voices
- providing an Indigenous student support role in the school
- providing strong, committed senior leadership for whole-school change
- investing in staff professional development
- establishing cross-school, multidisciplinary communication and collaboration structures.

⁶ Behrendt, L., Barber, T. & Graham, M. (2019) *AISNSW Pilot Project: Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, Final Evaluation Report Phase One March 2019*, Sydney: Association of Independent Schools NSW. Accessed 17 June 2019, <https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/newsroom/?ArticleId=1ea53dcc-1ef2-4629-998a-8020069ed33c>

⁷ 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; Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/mhsewb-framework_0.pdf

Challenges to achieving change through the projects included: tight project time frames for commencing and demonstrating impact; connecting and maintaining contact with family in rural/remote locations and recruiting Indigenous staff.

Phase 1 recommendations

The following recommendations were developed based on evidence from Phase 1.

1. The individual strategies identified through the pilot project are succeeding in all four schools to improve Indigenous students' academic and other outcomes and should be continued, with future work aiming to improve and strengthen the strategies.
2. In supporting Indigenous students, schools should adopt a holistic approach that recognises the interdependence of teaching and learning with cultural identity, physical, spiritual and mental health and wellbeing.
3. Consideration should be given by schools to employ Indigenous teaching and/or non-teaching staff to provide Indigenous students with the culturally responsive, holistic support that is fundamental to their wellbeing and academic development.
4. Schools need to be supported in identifying and providing appropriate support for Indigenous staff given identified difficulties in recruiting these staff.
5. Schools need to continue to prioritise and resource building strong, trusting, culturally respectful relationships with Indigenous students' families and communities.
6. Schools should work towards establishing organisation wide, formal arrangements for incorporating Indigenous input and guidance into the management and support of Indigenous students, and the wider school culture's incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, through developing Reconciliation Action Plans and establishing Indigenous advisory bodies.
7. Schools should continue to develop their processes and resources for supporting Indigenous students' transition, including transition into the school, during schooling and from school to further study/work.
8. This should include schools and the wider sector developing understanding of and associated support for Indigenous students' experiences of transition between the home and school environments, including into the boarding house environment.
9. Developing strong, culturally informed staff-student relationships is a core element of a holistic approach to Indigenous students' academic development and overall wellbeing and should be a priority.
10. Appropriate professional development should be provided to staff to support developing high expectations of and culturally responsive relationships with their Indigenous students.
11. Indigenous students need to be provided with tailored, individualised support for improved literacy and numeracy outcomes, including the provision of specialist expertise based in culturally responsive pedagogy.
12. Improving outcomes for Indigenous students occurs most effectively in a context of whole-school change guided by overt, demonstrated commitment from senior school leadership to

achieving improvement. This is a recommended position from where to begin project activities, and when considering the allocation of resources to schools to implement change.

13. It is important that all projects undertaken to improve Indigenous students' outcomes utilise student performance data and other sources of qualitative and quantitative information to determine project impact, including feedback from family, community and students.
14. Schools could establish more and stronger partnerships with relevant bodies including universities and other relevant Aboriginal organisations. This is particularly important in relation to supporting student transition pre-, during and post-school.
15. Increase the professional development opportunities provided by AISNSW. Project staff feedback regarding these activities was very positive and there appears to be a strong need for more professional support, including more online resources.
16. Ensure strong evaluation processes are established for any future project work that can extend the learnings from the pilot project. The limited time frame and small student numbers of the pilot project impacted upon the capacity for statistical analysis and generalisability of results. Longer term student tracking within the schools, as well as evaluating project impact across an increased student cohort, will provide greater capacity for extending understanding of what strategies are effective in supporting Indigenous students. Areas requiring further evaluation evidence include the long-term impact of specific literacy and numeracy strategies, supporting student transition and supporting students in boarding.

1.3 Background - Phase 2

On the basis of evaluation evidence demonstrating the progress made in Phase 1 schools towards improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and with the directions provided from the recommendations, AISNSW committed to extending the pilot project into a second 12 month phase commencing in May 2020.

1.3.1 Phase 2 schools and network project structure

Phase 2 of the pilot project continued the support to the four schools from Phase 1 and extended participation to an additional 12 schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The 16 Phase 2 schools comprised 12 boarding schools and four days schools, one of which was a state school. Four schools were situated in rural New South Wales and 12 were in urban areas (11 in Sydney and one in the Australian Capital Territory).

A key feature of Phase 2 was the use of a hub and spoke network model in which the four Phase 1 schools acted as hubs, with each supporting and mentoring three spoke schools, providing a total of four networks within the overarching project model. The model was intended to enable hub schools to share their learnings and experiences to the benefit of the new spoke schools and assist them in identifying opportunities, developing relevant strategies and addressing challenges to implementation. The model also allowed for the cross-school development and sharing of resources.

All project schools were required to prioritise improving literacy and numeracy through the project but had autonomy in identifying other objectives as well as the strategies they intended to adopt to achieve their objectives.

Table 2 below indicates the 16 projects schools, identifying the four networks, the four Phase 1 schools that functioned as hub schools in each of the networks, and the 12 spoke schools distributed across the networks.

Table 2. Phase 2 pilot project schools

Network 1	Network 3
Kempsey Adventist School (hub school)	Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview (hub school)
Casino Christian School (spoke school)	Barker College (spoke school)
Casino High School (spoke school)	Knox Grammar School (spoke school)
Taree Christian College (spoke school)	Loreto Normanhurst (spoke school)
Network 2	Network 4
Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill (hub school)	Pymble Ladies' College (hub school)
Canberra Grammar School (spoke school)	Calrossy Anglican College (spoke school)
Macquarie Anglican Grammar School (spoke school)	Kinross Wolaroi School (spoke school)
Shore (spoke school)	The Scots College (spoke school)

1.4 Co-design of the Phase 2 Waratah Outcomes Framework

With 16 network schools working towards improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, establishing a common framework for demonstrating progress became a critical component of the evaluation process. Drawing on Phase 1 outcomes and learnings, Phase 2 school action plans, as well as policy and research evidence, the Evaluation Team commenced planning for the co-design of an outcomes framework and indicator system.

An outcomes framework provided a transparent and uniform approach to monitoring and reporting progress by articulating and establishing connections between project strategies and intended outcomes. The further unpacking of outcomes into areas of change enabled identification of indicators that provide reliable measures of progress, performance, or achievement. Together, the outcomes framework and indicator system provided an evidence-based tool that enabled the use of shared language and measures for evidencing both individual and collective contribution towards outcomes.

Consistent with an evaluation approach that weaves together Indigenous Research Methodologies and Western evaluation practices, the Evaluation Team explored the use of the waratah as a holistic basis for the framework (see Box 1). Central to this exploration was the desire for the framework to reflect the organic and interconnected nature of the task at hand; to convey the complex and multifactorial nature of the change processes involved in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within an education context. In alignment with Indigenous Research Methodologies, it was also a priority to encourage a positive narrative of strength and resilience in the use of the tool, and to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' needs at the heart of the framework.

Box 1. The waratah and its significance to Aboriginal people



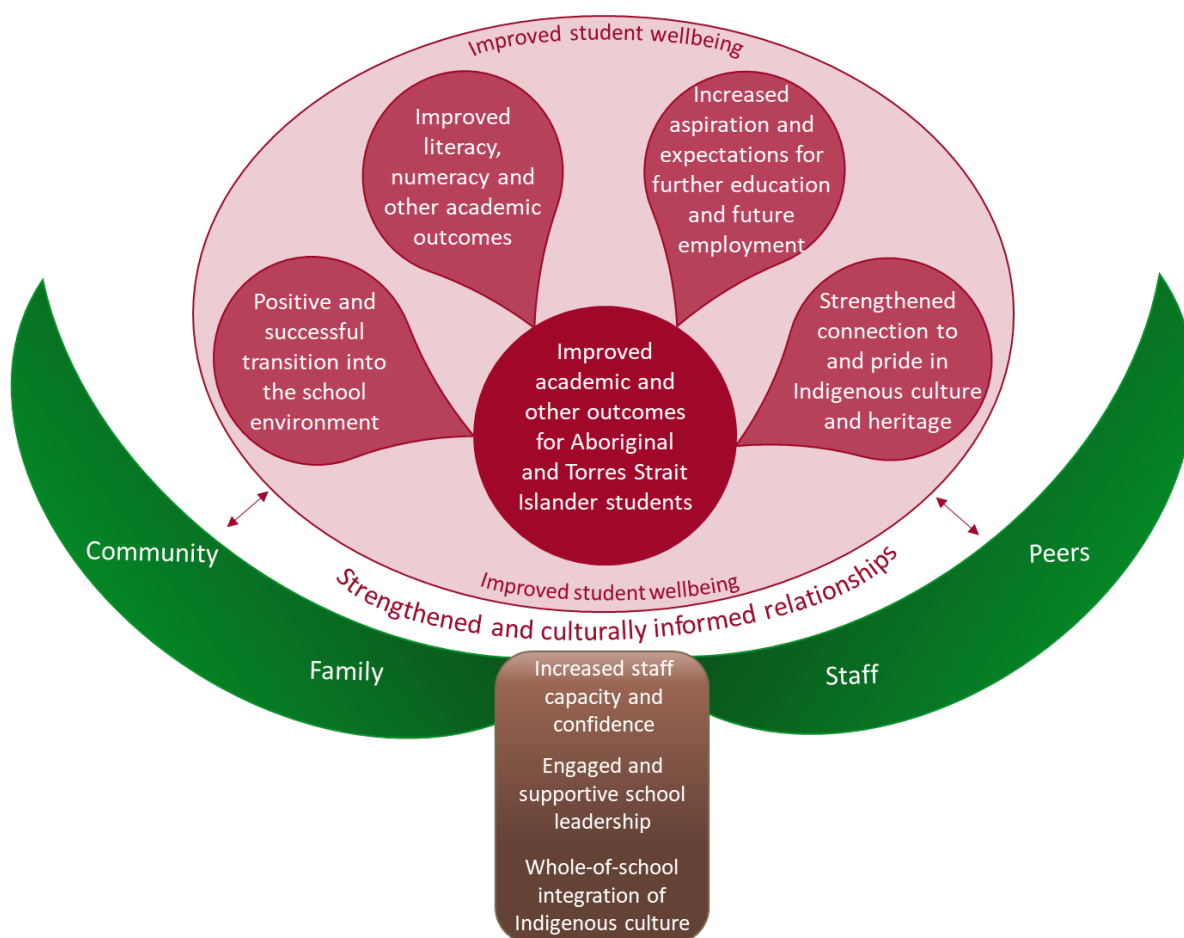
The waratah is a spectacular and resilient Australian native plant that flowers prolifically and tends to be long-lived in suitable conditions. It resists destruction by bushfires by regenerating from the rootstock. The word waratah is derived from the Dharug word 'warada', and the plant and flower have great spiritual significance to Aboriginal people. Dreamtime stories about the waratah feature themes of love, bravery and protection⁸. The nectar of the waratah can be gathered and used as a spiritual or ceremonial drink, or as a medicinal drink for young children, and the flower is traditionally carried to provide immunity against burns from bushfire⁹.

The Waratah Outcomes Framework identifies ten high level outcomes, including five student outcomes, two stakeholder relationship outcomes, two staff outcomes, and one whole-of-school outcome. The outcomes for Indigenous students are presented at the centre of the Framework as the flower of the waratah, featuring four key academic and other outcomes as petals encapsulated by a holistic wellbeing outcome. The flower is supported by the leaves of the plant, representing the relationships between students and family, community, staff and peers. Finally, the flower and leaves are held up by the stalk or rootstock of the waratah, representing the foundational outcomes for staff, school leadership, and for the school as a whole. The Waratah Outcomes Framework evolved over the interim period of Phase 2 of the project, incorporating and responding to suggestions and feedback from network schools and AISNSW stakeholders. Figure 1 shows the latest version of the Framework.

⁸ Bodkin-Andrews, G., O'Rourke, V., Dillon, A., Craven, R. G., & Yeung, A. S. (2012). Engaging the disengaged? A longitudinal analysis of the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students' academic self-concept and disengagement. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 11, 179-195.

⁹ Wesson, S. (2009). Murni, Dhungang, Jirrar: *Living in the Illawarra*. Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW. Accessed 11 December 2019, <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/murni-dhungang-jirrar-living-in-the-illawarra>

Figure 1. Waratah Outcomes Framework (Version 3)



An indicator system was also co-created as a component of the Waratah Outcomes Framework. This system unpacked the ten high level outcomes into outcome areas and provided suggested indicators for each. Network schools participated in a co-design activity to develop the indicator system at the network schools workshop held on 3 September 2019. Project teams from each school discussed draft outcome areas and indicators, highlighted indicators relevant to their school's project, and added outcome areas and indicators that their project was working towards but did not appear in the draft system. Project teams submitted their work to the evaluation team at the end of the workshop, and data was audited and used to amend and further develop the indicator system. The Waratah Outcomes Framework and Indicator System encouraged the use of common language and measures by network schools when providing evidence of progress towards achieving intended outcomes for students, staff, and community. The current Framework outcomes and outcome areas are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. The Waratah Framework outcomes and outcome areas

Outcome	Outcome areas
<i>Improved academic and other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</i>	
1. Students have improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes	Student literacy, Student numeracy, Student engagement, Academic confidence, Academic preparedness, Expectations of academic outcomes, Satisfaction with academic support, School completion
2. Students experience a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment	Staff awareness and understanding of support required for successful transition, Familiarity and confidence with the school environment, Satisfaction with support for transition, Peer support in transition, Student safety and belonging, Student retention
3. Students have increased aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities	Awareness of further education options, Aspiration towards further education, Expectations and confidence towards further education, Awareness of future employment options, Aspiration towards future employment, Expectations and confidence towards future employment, Satisfaction with transition-out support, Student destinations and graduate outcomes
4. Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage	Awareness of Indigenous culture and heritage, including within the school, Connection to Indigenous culture, community and Country, Cultural safety at school, Pride in Indigenous culture and heritage, Valuing of Indigenous culture and heritage
5. Students have improved social, emotional and physical wellbeing	Overall wellbeing, Physical wellbeing/connection to body, Mental wellbeing/connection to mind and emotions, Connection to culture, family, community and Country, Student safety and belonging, Student perception of care and support, Satisfaction with relationships
<i>Strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders</i>	
6. Relationships between school, family and community are strengthened and culturally informed	Awareness of cultural elements within relationships, Satisfaction with communication, Family and community voice in decision-making, Trust and strength of school, family and community relationships, Family engagement, Community engagement, Satisfaction with relationships
7. Relationships between staff and students are strengthened and culturally informed	Awareness of cultural elements within relationships, Understanding of student circumstances and culture, High-expectations relationships (staff-student), Student perception of care and support, Trust and strength of relationships, Satisfaction with relationships
<i>Engaged, supportive and culturally competent school leadership and staff</i>	
8. Staff have the knowledge, skills and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices	Awareness of Indigenous culture, Engagement in Indigenous culture, Cultural competence, Confidence to implement culturally responsive practices, Implementation of culturally responsive practices

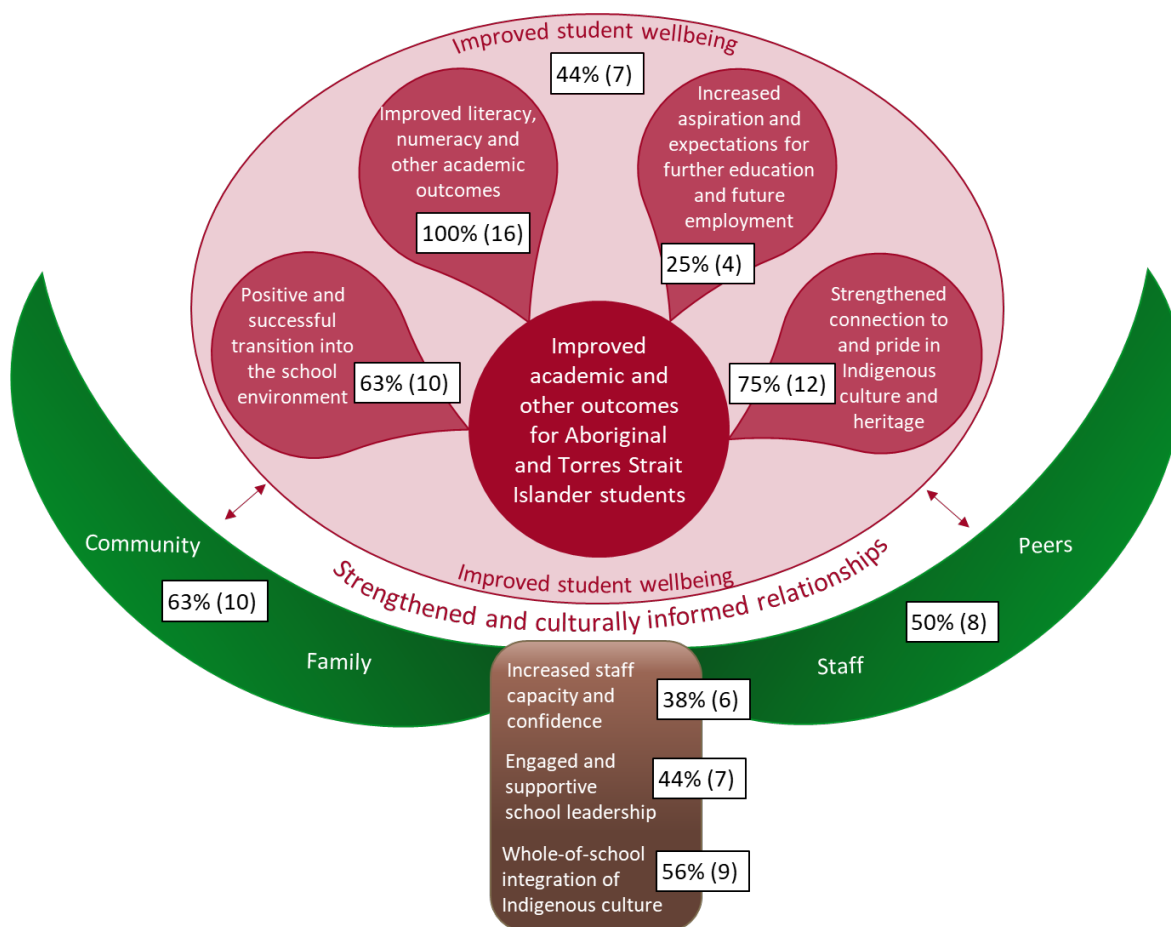
Outcome	Outcome areas
9. School leadership are engaged, supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Engagement in Indigenous culture, Support for improving outcomes for Indigenous students, Understanding of requirements and issues in improving outcomes for Indigenous students, Demonstrated commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students
<i>Whole-of-school integration of Indigenous culture</i>	
10. Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life	Awareness and acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and perspectives, Valuing of Indigenous culture and perspectives, Integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives

It is important to note that the Framework is an evolving tool that is responsive to stakeholder feedback and emerging evidence through practice as Phase 2 of the pilot project unfolded. Network schools were encouraged to use shared language and measures where relevant and appropriate, but also to add alternate and modify existing outcomes and outcome areas if they felt that the current Framework did not adequately capture the changes for students, staff and community that their projects were working towards.

1.4.1 Project schools' priority outcomes mapped against the Waratah Outcomes Framework

Participating schools were asked to consider the extent to which their projects focused on key aspects of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by indicating a priority level for each outcome identified in the Waratah Outcomes Framework (priority levels: high, medium, low, or not a current priority), with the understanding that all schools were expected to have improving student literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes as a high priority (Outcome 1). Figure 2 shows the proportion and number of schools indicating a high or medium priority level for each of the ten outcomes in the Framework. As well as the high priority focus on academic outcomes, more than half of participating schools prioritised strengthened connection to and pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage (75%, n=12), strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, family and community (63%, n=10), support for a positive and successful transition experience for Indigenous students into the school and boarding environment (63%, n=10), and whole-of-school acknowledgement, valuing and integration of Indigenous culture (56%, n=9).

Figure 2: Project schools' priorities throughout Phase 2. Figure shows the proportion and number of project schools indicating Waratah Framework outcomes as either a high or medium priority.



Schools were also invited to identify additional outcomes for their projects that were not adequately described by the Waratah Outcomes Framework. For example, Kempsey Adventist College prioritised working towards whole school pedagogical change to create learning experiences that engage all students. Examination of strategies and evidence of progress in relation to this school-specific outcome showed strong alignment with two outcomes from the Waratah Framework - that is, improving staff knowledge, skills and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Outcome 8), as well as integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives into curriculum and school life (Outcome 10). Analysis of all evaluation evidence was undertaken both within and across the Framework to ensure that in this and other instances, the full range of outcomes achieved through Phase 2 of the project were considered and assessed.

2. Evaluation methodology and process

2.1 Evaluation purpose and scope

The primary purpose of the external evaluation was to identify and determine the effectiveness of strategies and activities that the project schools implemented to improve academic and other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The evaluation also aimed to identify the impact of the hub and spoke network model and the extent to which it was effective in supporting the achievement of enhanced student outcomes in networked schools, as well as the usefulness of the network model as a scaling up strategy.

As noted in the introduction to this report, the intended evaluation time frame was for a 12-month project implementation period commencing in May 2019. However, because of the severe impact of COVID-19 upon all aspects of school life including schools' capacity to implement and evaluate their project activities, it was decided to change the evaluation period cut-off date to 24 March 2020, at which point students across NSW were formally transferred to remote and online learning from home. Exceptional data inclusion from Term 2 2020 occurred for repeated measures of assessments using specialised literacy and numeracy programs such as Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT Reading and Maths, section 4.1.2).

2.2 Evaluation questions

The core evaluation questions were:

1. What strategies and activities were implemented in each school through the project to improve students' literacy, numeracy and other targeted outcomes?
2. What has been the impact of these strategies and activities in relation to intended and unintended outcomes?
3. How effective is the hub-spoke network model in supporting the achievement of enhanced student outcomes in the 16 project schools?
4. How effective is the participatory evaluation approach in building project staff's capacity for implementing their own evaluation processes?

2.3 Evaluation methodology

The Evaluation Team's methodology was grounded in the core principles of Indigenous Research Methodologies¹⁰, the practices advocated in the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* developed by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies¹¹, and the core

¹⁰ Smith, L.T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd Ed.). London: Zed books; Williams, M. (2018). Ngaa-bi-nya Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluation framework. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 18:1, 6-20.

¹¹ Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2012). *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*. Accessed 16 June 2019, <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>

values specified by the National Health and Medical Research Council¹² for ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

2.3.1 Guiding principles for the external evaluation

Drawing upon these sources the following guiding principles formed the basis of the evaluation methodology:

- Establishing authentic, genuine, ethical relationships with those involved in the evaluation
- Ensuring awareness and respect for cultural protocols, values and behaviours is integral to the work
- Ensuring Indigenous people's needs are central in planning the evaluation
- Enhancing Indigenous peoples' skills and knowledge
- Accountability to the Indigenous participants and their communities
- Maximising the usefulness of the evaluation by using culturally appropriate methods for providing feedback and disseminating the findings to the community.

The methodology was intended to provide formative evaluation that would support project implementation as well as summative evaluation that would identify project impact. It was also designed to capture learnings at both the individual school project level, as well as at the collective whole-project level.

2.3.2 Participatory evaluation approach

A key element of the external evaluation was a participatory evaluation approach. A participatory approach is sometimes described as co-design, which in the Indigenous context has been conceptualised as weaving together Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing with Western knowledge to ensure policies, programs and services are co-owned and co-produced by communities¹³. The external evaluation extended the guiding principles and the co-design approach to not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved in the project, but to the project initiators and funders (AISNSW) and the school communities, with the intent of maximising the learnings from and benefits derived from the project.

The participatory evaluation process involved working with AISNSW and project school representatives to share and develop the underlying evaluation methodology, clarify the evaluation purpose and develop the Waratah Outcomes Framework (see 1.4 above).

¹² National Health and Medical Research Council. (2018). *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders* (2018), Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra. Accessed 16 December 2019, <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities>

¹³ Dreise, T. & Mazurski, E. (2018). *Weaving Knowledges: Knowledge exchange, co-design and community-based participatory research and evaluation in Aboriginal communities*. NSW: Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales, p.2.

Building school capacity to undertake evaluation through the participatory evaluation approach

Critical to the participatory evaluation approach was building school capacity to undertake evaluation. The Evaluation Team introduced this approach in Phase 1 of the pilot project, working with key school stakeholders over the two-year implementation period to build their evaluation capacity. This contributed to both capacity building within the four Phase 1 project schools, and for these schools to become effective project leads in Phase 2, guiding new schools in designing their projects and associated evaluation methods.

Developing project school staff's capacities in research and evaluation occurred throughout Phase 2, including through embedding capacity building into the network workshops conducted in Sydney in September 2019, November 2019 and February 2020, and via Zoom technology in May 2020 (due to COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face meetings). The topics addressed in the workshops included:

- Understanding the principles of Indigenous Research Methodologies
- Developing and using an outcomes framework to articulate and align project strategies, indicators and intended outcomes
- Identifying challenges to project implementation and ways of managing these
- Identifying strengths within school communities for improving Indigenous students' academic and other outcomes
- Using a range of methods and data sources to demonstrate progress towards project outcomes
- Effective project reporting.

2.4 Evaluation methods, data sources and analysis

Reflecting the evaluation methodology that intertwines Indigenous and Western approaches¹⁴ a mixed methods model was planned that would provide qualitative and quantitative data through the following methods and data sources.

- Evaluation reports from project schools that would provide both qualitative and quantitative data
- A visit to each project school to undertake focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' family and community members, and interviews with key project staff.

Because of COVID-19 however it was not possible to visit the project schools to undertake the student focus groups or family/community focus groups in March 2020 as planned. Some consideration was given to conducting interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' family and community members virtually, but this was decided against given the extreme pressures being experienced by all during COVID-19 and the added stress to school communities of attempting to organise interviews at this time. It was also reasoned that the severe disruption caused by COVID-

¹⁴ Singh, M., & Major, J. (2017). Conducting Indigenous research in Western knowledge spaces: aligning theory and methodology. *Australian Education Research*, 44, 5-19. Accessed 10 May 2020, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs13384-017-0233-z.pdf>

19 upon all aspects of peoples' lives would reduce interviewees' interest and availability to participate in the interviews, and their capacity to give due consideration to the project and its impact upon students' learning and other outcomes.

The project staff interviews did however proceed and were conducted by either telephone or Zoom according to the interviewee's preference (see 2.4.2 below).

While it was not possible to meet with students or family members, it was fortunate that because of the established participatory evaluation approach, and support to schools in collecting a wide range of data, the External Evaluation Team was able to draw from the schools' reports on direct feedback from students and family and incorporate this information into the evaluation findings. This is described further below (see 2.4.1).

2.4.1. School evaluation reports

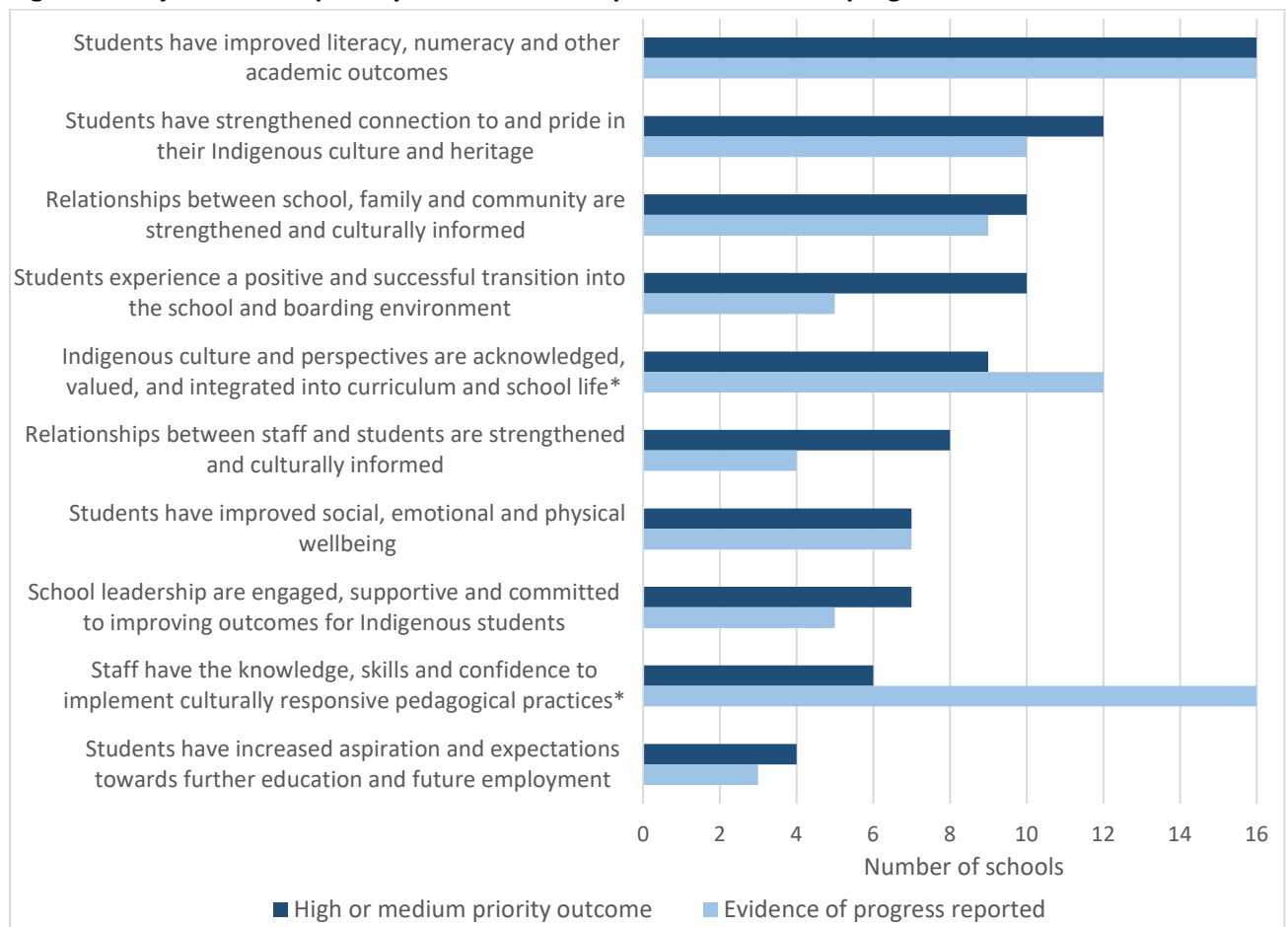
Schools were required to provide two evaluation reports: an interim report in November 2019 and a final report in June 2020. Reporting templates were provided which were specifically designed to enable the project schools to document their unique approaches and experiences, while providing information that could be used to generate a collective picture of progress across all schools regarding what strategies and activities were effective in improving Indigenous students' outcomes, and the effectiveness of the hub and spoke network model.

Schools were required to report on their strategies, activities, and evidence of progress towards Outcome 1 (Students have improved literacy, numeracy, and other outcomes) at both the interim and final stages of the project. Project teams were also expected to report on at least two other outcomes at the interim stage and encouraged to report on progress towards any other outcomes at the end of Phase 2. Schools were also asked to report on project benefits, achievements, challenges and key lessons learned, and on their experience of the hub and spoke network model. Schools were provided with support in report completion through the network workshops as well as ongoing support provided by the External Evaluation Team via telephone and email.

Project schools' evidencing of outcomes

Collectively, the 16 network schools reported on progress towards all ten outcomes, with individual schools reporting evidence for between four and eight outcomes each. Figure 3 shows the number of schools indicating high or medium priority levels compared with the number of schools reporting evidence for each outcome. All schools reported evidence on their efforts and progress in improving literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes (100%, n=16). Interestingly, all schools also reported improved staff knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices (100%, n=16) despite the relatively lower priority of that outcome for many schools. Analysis showed considerable alignment between professional learning and development opportunities for staff and several other outcomes identified in the Framework. Other outcomes frequently evidenced by project teams include whole-of-school acknowledgement and integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives (75%, n=12), strengthened connection to and pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage (63%, n=10), and strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, family and community (56%, n=9).

Figure 3. Project schools' priority outcomes and reported evidence of progress



*Includes evidence reported towards school-specific outcome: Pedagogy is changed to create learning experiences that engage all students

Evaluation methods used by project schools to evidence progress towards outcomes

Participating schools used a wide range of evaluation methods and tools to gather quantitative and qualitative data to learn about their project's progress and provide evidence to support their achievements. All schools used multiple evaluation methods drawing on data from a range of sources and perspectives. The most frequently used evaluation methods by schools throughout Phase 2 are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Evaluation methods used by schools throughout Phase 2

Evaluation method or tool	Examples of data sources	Proportion of schools reporting use % (n)
Pre and post program testing and repeated measures tracking	Specialised literacy and numeracy programs featuring pre and post testing or multiple levels of assessment that school staff implement directly with students – for example, Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) and York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC). Please see Section 4.1.1 for further examples.	100% (16)
Secondary data analysis	Personalised Learning Plans (PLP), school reports and student academic records, National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data, course enrolment records, student attendance records, student written work or assessment tasks, and internal documents such as project planning and review notes, meeting agendas and minutes.	94% (15)
Direct observation including photographs	Direct observation of students, support staff, and teachers, including observation in class or tutoring sessions, during events and activities, and before and after professional learning. Direct observation includes photographic records of events such as assemblies and objects such as artworks.	88% (14)
Surveys	Online and paper-based surveys of Indigenous students, parents and family members of Indigenous students, community members, and staff. Surveys designed for annual implementation with first iteration as a baseline for future comparison, as well as pre and post program surveys for more targeted evaluation.	75% (12)
Direct communication including informal feedback	Personal communication and feedback to support staff or project team members from students, family members, staff and community members. Includes email or text message correspondence between support staff and teachers, support staff and school leaders, staff and students, staff and parents or family members.	75% (12)
Interviews	Formal or structured and informal or unstructured interviews with past and present staff and students.	38% (6)
Focus groups	Focus groups or discussion groups with Indigenous students and community elders. Also includes staff discussion groups held as part of professional development, staff inquiry meetings, and executive tabled conversations.	31% (5)
Case study of an individual student or parent group	Case study focused on an individual student journey or experience across multiple outcomes, as well as case study of a parent group involved in a particular program.	31% (5)
Reflective statements and journals	Reflective responses from staff, Indigenous students and their parents or family members to evaluative prompts about programs and experiences.	13% (2)

Statistical analysis of aggregate Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) data

All schools were invited to submit deidentified PAT Maths and Reading data on a customised Excel reporting template at the final stage of Phase 2. Data from templates received from schools was collated and cleaned. Data from scheduled assessments in Term 2 2020 was included to enable paired analysis of student achievement at two time points. Inclusion occurred following determination of no significant differences in the mean ranks of all key measures with and without Term 2 2020 data (see section 4.1.2).

Cross-sectional analysis of the most recent assessment time point included descriptive statistics to determine measures of central tendency (mean and median) and spread (standard deviation and range) in the key PAT measures of scaled scores, percentile ranks and stanine scores. Paired analysis was used to explore differences in individual student achievement on PAT Maths and Reading assessments at two time points during the project period and Term 2 2020. Pairs of PAT Maths and Reading assessments at two time points were identified, and difference scores between assessment time points were calculated.

Nonparametric inferential statistics were used throughout quantitative analysis due to high variance in the data and unequal sample sizes in sub-cohort groups. Schools were provided with an opportunity to report extenuating circumstances that may have contributed to extreme values. Where no extenuating circumstances were reported, high variability in data was accepted as a reflection of individual variation in student performance, and a nonparametric approach was preferable to attempts to reduce variance through removal of outliers and extreme values in the data. For example, the Mann-Whitney U test of independent samples was undertaken to determine gender differences in key PAT measures, and the Wilcoxon signed rank test was undertaken to test the probability that median difference scores of paired PAT Maths and Reading data were not zero. All significance tests were two-tailed, and analysis was performed using SPSS 26.

2.4.2 Interviews with key project staff

Schools were asked to nominate one or two staff with key involvement in the project and specific responsibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to participate in a semi-structured interview with a member of the Evaluation Team. As noted above, given the incapacity of the Evaluation Team to meet with the interviewees in person because of COVID-19, the interviewees were given the option of participating by telephone or by Zoom. University ethics protocols were followed for the interview including obtaining the interviewee's informed consent prior to the interview, ensuring interviewees that all information would be treated confidentially and their privacy protected by securely storing the data at UTS, and that they would be de-identified in the stored data and all published findings.

A total of 23 staff participated in the interviews, comprised of three Indigenous staff (one female and two male) and 20 non-Indigenous staff (14 females and six males). Five staff chose to participate by telephone and 18 by Zoom.

The interviews were approximately one hour in duration and, with the interviewees' permission, were audio recorded. Interviewees were provided with the guiding questions beforehand, which focused on what the interviewees' saw as the main/most important elements of their school's project, how it had impacted upon their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other members of the community, the main enablers and challenges to project implementation, the

impact of the hub-spoke network model on the project, and whether their practice as an educator had been influenced through the project. The interview also enquired about learnings through the COVID-19 period which will be reported separately to this evaluation report. Interviewees held positions across the school with titles summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Positions held by school staff participating in the evaluation interviews

Interviewees' positions	Number of interviewees
Cultural Mentor	1
School principal	2
Head of Indigenous Education	2
Indigenous/First Nations Education Coordinator	6
Indigenous Students Learning Support	2
Instructional Leader for Literacy and Numeracy	1
Director of Learning	1
Director of Inclusion	1
Director of Mission	1
Director of Active Education	1
Dean of Learning	2
Head of Enrolments	1
Head of Diversity and Justice	1
Head of Primary	1
Total number of interviewees	23

Analysis of interviews

The interview audio recordings were transcribed, and manual thematic analysis was undertaken. This involved coding and analysing responses according to the specific Waratah Outcomes Framework areas (including identifying activities and strategies, their impact, enablers and challenges for each of the Framework outcomes) and the hub and spoke network model. Coding was then undertaken to identify and analyse other themes emerging across all interviews (for example enablers and challenges which were identified as having an impact across the project rather than being specific to a particular outcome area, and other project successes and challenges). Analysis included consideration of the importance of themes generated through the interviews, as reflected in the frequency with which the topic/subject was raised in the interviews and the emphasis placed on the it (for example through the emotion conveyed by the interviewee or length of time spent discussing the topic/subject).

To ensure confidentiality, interviewees' names, positions and schools are not provided and instead they are referred to in the report numerically (for example Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2).

2.5 Limitations of the evaluation

The most significant limitation of the evaluation was due to the impact of COVID-19 and the inability of the Evaluation Team to meet directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and with their family and community members. While this was to some extent mitigated by the extensive information provided by schools to the Evaluation Team in their reports, as outlined above, it limited

the degree to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices could be heard through the evaluation.

A further limitation was the availability of paired quantitative data to demonstrate progress in relation to students' progress in literacy and numeracy, resulting in exceptional inclusion of PAT Reading and Maths data from Term 2 2020, variability in the inter-test interval of repeated assessments, and relatively small sample sizes limiting sub-cohort analysis by gender and school level (primary school vs. high school). This situation is addressed further in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

2.6 Ethics approval

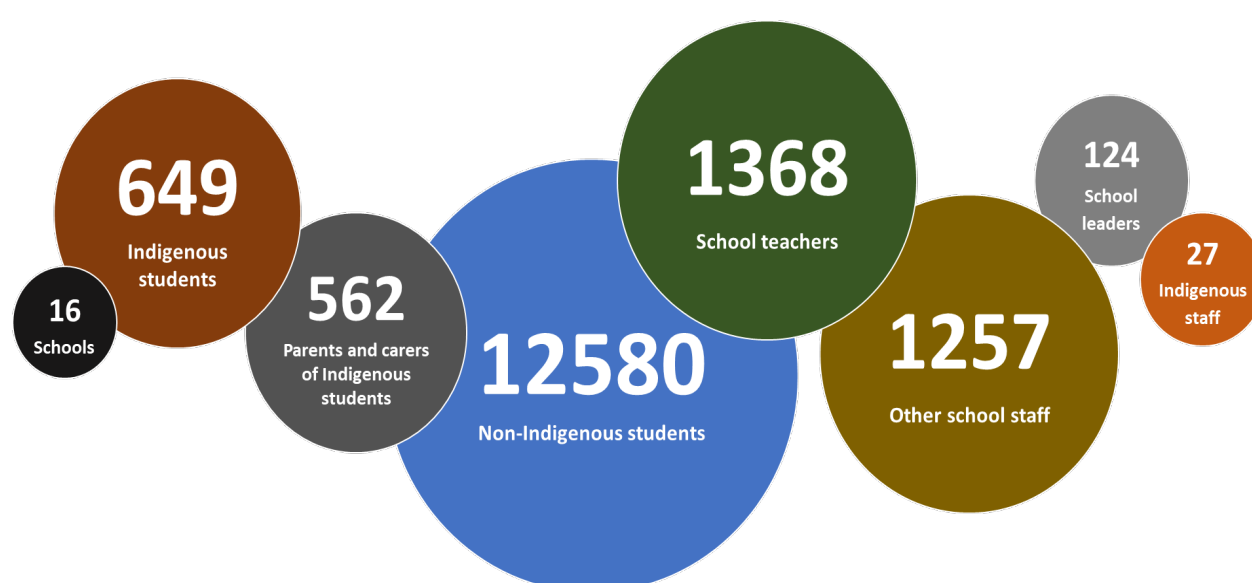
The evaluation of this project received ethics approval from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (UTS HREC REF NO. ETH19-3553).

3. Overview of project reach and target groups engaged

3.1 Overall project reach

The 16 participating schools in Phase 2 of the AISNSW Pilot Project *Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students* engaged a range of target groups through their project strategies and activities. These target groups included Indigenous students, parents and carers of Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students, school teachers, other school staff, school leaders and Indigenous school staff. Overall project reach of these key target groups is represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Overall project reach



3.1.1 Engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by project schools

All 16 participating schools focused on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through their project work. This primary target group of the AISNSW Phase 2 Pilot Project included 649 Indigenous students. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students targeted in Phase 2 were high school students (79%, n=515) and the remaining 21 per cent (n=134) were primary school students. Figure 5 shows the proportion of Indigenous primary and high school students engaged by gender. Overall, there were more Indigenous boys than girls targeted through the 16 network schools (55% vs 45%, n=354 boys, 295 girls), an unsurprising finding given that five of the seven single-sex schools participating in the project were boys' schools. Interestingly, the gender balance in the co-educational schools was reversed. In these nine schools, 54 per cent of Indigenous students targeted through the project were female (n=247) while the remaining 46 per cent were male (n=213).

Figure 5. Proportion and number of Indigenous male and female primary and high school students targeted by project schools. Data shown was collated across the entire project period.

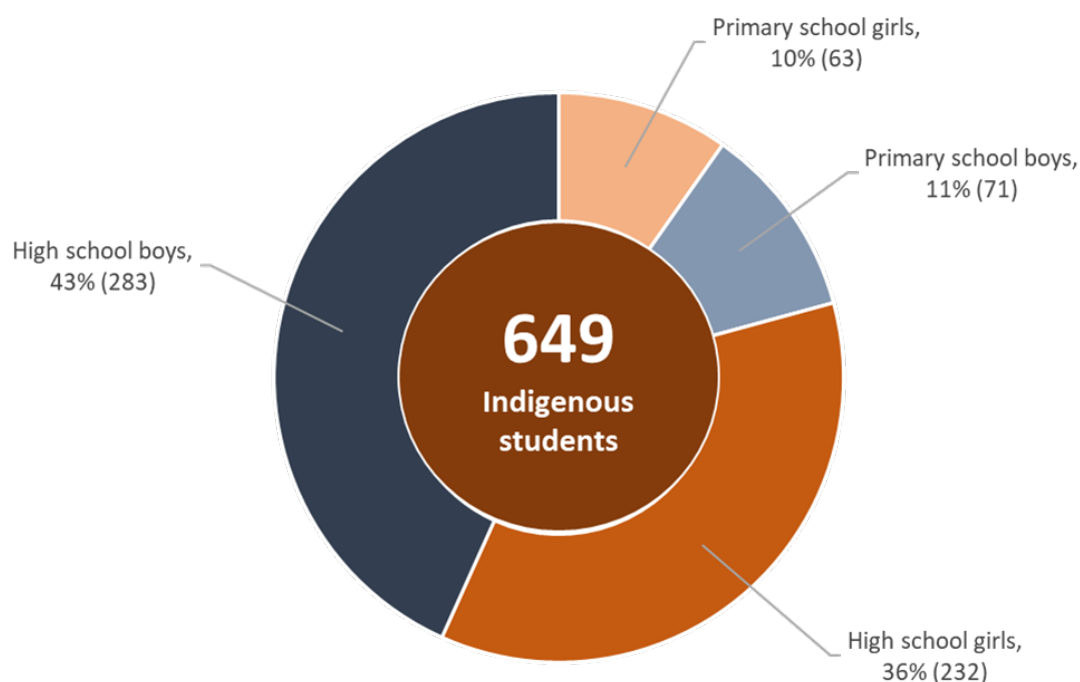
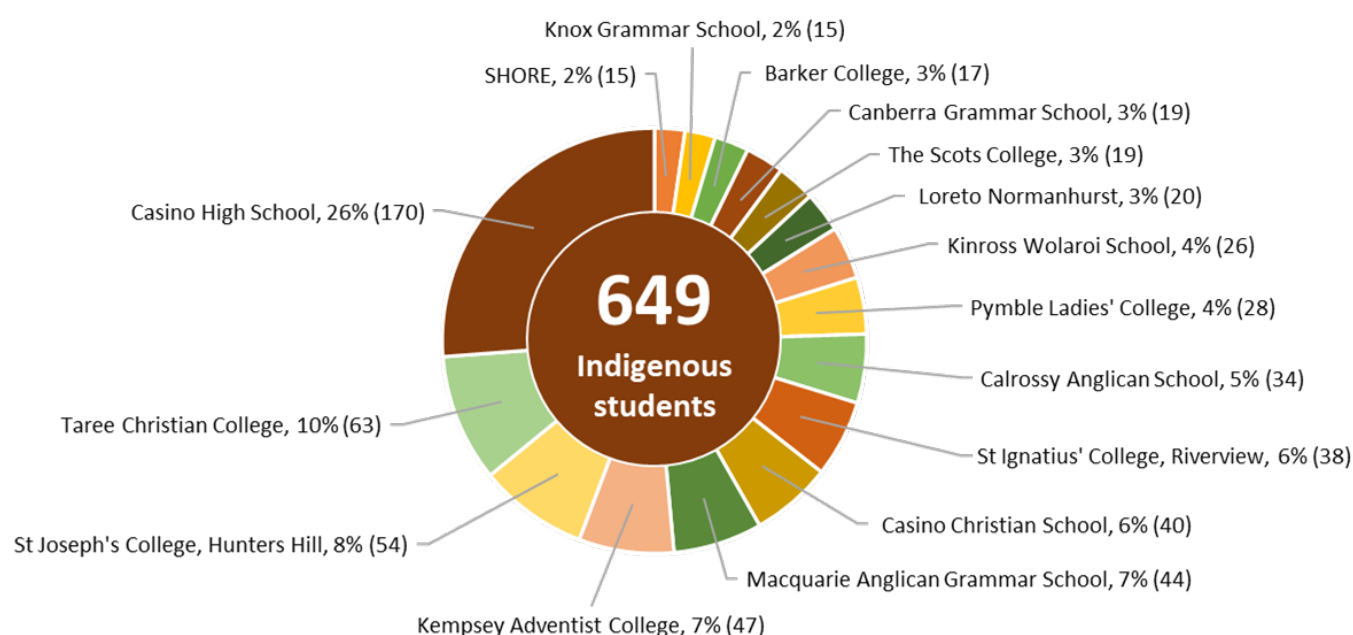


Figure 6 shows the proportion and number of Indigenous students from the Phase 2 Indigenous student target group engaged at each participating school. This data includes Indigenous students engaged by schools across both the 2019 and 2020 school years and was calculated by adding the number of Indigenous students reported as new to schools in 2020 to the number of Indigenous students engaged in 2019. The proportion of the Phase 2 Indigenous student target group (n=649) engaged at each project school ranged from two to 26 per cent. These figures need to be interpreted within the context of several influencing factors, such as overall representation of Indigenous students within each school (ranges from less than one to 23 per cent), school size in terms of total enrolments, school geographic location and the demographics of the local community, and provision of and non-local Indigenous student access to boarding facilities.

Figure 6. Phase 2 Indigenous student target group representation at project schools. Data shown is the total number and proportion of Indigenous students targeted at each school over the entire project period.



3.1.2 Engagement of other target groups by project schools

In addition to the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, participating schools engaged a range of other target groups, including non-Indigenous students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous school teachers, school leaders and other school staff, and Indigenous parents and carers. Depending on the nature and formality of project activities undertaken, precise reporting of engagement with these target groups was challenging in some instances. Schools were asked to provide approximate numbers where possible, along with additional details or comments about the nature of the engagement. Proportions of schools reporting engagement with other target groups, and the approximate number of people engaged across all schools is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Project school engagement with target groups other than Indigenous students

Other target groups	Proportion of schools reporting engagement with target group % (n)	Approximate number of individuals engaged n
Parents and carers of Indigenous students	88 (14)	562
School teachers	88 (14)	1368
Other school staff	88 (14)	1257
School leaders	81 (13)	124
Indigenous staff	75 (12)	27
Non-Indigenous students	69 (11)	12 580

Most project schools (88%, n=14) reported significant engagement with parents and carers of Indigenous students as part of their projects, often through family events, local and on-Country visits, and ongoing communication. Some schools also reported engagement with parents and carers

of Indigenous students as part of enhanced processes to develop and continually improve personalised student learning plans and profiles (PLPs).

Most schools also considered engagement with school staff as part of their project work, with 88 per cent (n=14) of schools targeting teachers, 88 per cent (n=14) targeting other school staff, and 81 per cent (n=13) targeting school leaders. Across the cohort of participating schools, 75 per cent (n=12) of schools reported the engagement of a total of 27 Indigenous staff. Engagement with school staff included professional development and cultural competency programs, ongoing connection with teachers and support staff regarding student programs and progress, as well as direct involvement and leadership for the project.

Nearly 70 per cent (69%, n=11) of participating schools reported targeting of non-Indigenous students through their projects. Engagement ranged from groups of students involved in specific programs such as Indigenous language and Visual Art learning experiences to the entire non-Indigenous school population targeted through whole-of-school integration of Indigenous culture.

Examples of the nature of schools' engagement with both Indigenous students and other target groups, as well as evidence of outcomes associated with this engagement is featured in Chapters 4 through 7 of this report.

4. Progress towards improved academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

4.1 Students have improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes (Outcome 1)

A focus on working towards improved literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was central to projects undertaken in all 16 project schools. All schools were required to consider a focus on improved academic outcomes as a high priority outcome and report on their progress in this area at both the interim and final stages of the project.

4.1.1 Strategies and activities to improve literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes

Strategies

The most common strategy for improving academic outcomes was providing students with individualised targeted learning and support for literacy and numeracy. Depending on their level of experience with an individualised support strategy, schools undertook extensive work in either establishing or revising processes to implement personalised learning plans for Indigenous students. Part of this revision process was an increased emphasis on communication related to targeted support with teachers, parents, and family, and with students themselves. Closely aligned with strategies to provide individualised support were efforts to substantiate understanding and communication of students' academic needs and progress with both existing and newly acquired data. There was a clear recognition across most schools of the benefits of improved systems to organise, analyse, and utilise data to inform learning support program development and implementation.

As part of their planning and improvement processes, some schools with a history of implementing individualised targeted strategies reported taking the sustainability of these approaches into account as overall numbers of Indigenous students increase and learning support needs and requirements diversify.

We will continue reflecting upon, adjusting and improving the individualised, targeted support students receive in literacy and numeracy; and, increase sustainability of these approaches as the numbers of Indigenous students at the College increase and as literacy and numeracy support needs further diversify (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

There were also schools taking a small-group approach to providing targeted learning and support, particularly in literacy and academic skills, while still assessing, tracking, and communicating student progress on an individual level.

Schools reporting school-wide strategies described taking a holistic approach towards improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, including Indigenous students. Although articulated as whole-of-school, this approach still allowed for specific targeting, however this may have been based on student capability or need for literacy and numeracy support in general, rather than on support for Indigenous students specifically.

Several schools emphasised the importance of supporting the physical, emotional, and sociocultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students alongside their learning needs in literacy, numeracy, and other academic areas.

Whilst this pathway may not appear to immediately impact academic outcomes, we are quickly finding that by supporting boys pastorally, this has a direct and significant impact on academic achievement in the short and long term (Project report, Shore).

Regardless of whether schools reported taking an individualised, small group or whole-school approach to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, schools recognised the need to build student engagement, confidence, expectations and aspirations, as well as wellbeing and cultural connection, as part of holistic strategies that support the entirety and complexity of Indigenous students' lives.

Activities

Activities undertaken by project schools to improve literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes included:

- Personalised Learning Plans (PLP)
- involvement of specialist staff
- specialised literacy and numeracy programs and assessment
- targeted in-class literacy and numeracy support
- targeted literacy and numeracy support provided outside of class time.

i. Personalised Learning Plans

A form of personalised learning plan, profile, or pathway (PLP) was the most prominent feature of schools' individualised and targeted approach to literacy and numeracy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. In total, 81 per cent (n=13) of schools described processes around the development and implementation of PLPs for individual Indigenous students.

Most schools described developing or revising existing PLPs for students early in the school year, followed by a plan to revisit the PLP at various times throughout the year. Examples of processes put in place to develop the plans were thoughtful and consultative. PLPs were always developed in collaboration with students, and in many instances also in collaboration with teachers, counsellors, learning support staff, parents, and other family members. Several schools conducted interviews with students about areas they would like to improve and feel more confident in, in order to establish short and long-term goals for the semester or year. Students were sometimes invited to discuss their PLP forms in small groups of students or complete surveys that informed development of the PLP, with opportunities to share insights into student strengths, interests, and preferred approaches to learning. In some school contexts, parents and family members were also involved in the development of the PLP, perhaps working in collaboration with students and support staff, or reviewing draft plans and being invited to contribute or discuss further.

Although the focus of the PLPs was primarily on individualised learning support, schools often took a holistic approach to the PLP design, including physical, emotional, and sociocultural wellbeing components and requirements. For example, background information on physical and emotional health, identification of healthcare needs and any related adjustments or provisions, and associated follow-up such as Speech and Language Pathology sessions, optometry appointments, Indigenous health clinic appointments, referrals to school or community counselling services and so on.

Several schools reported adapting their PLPs throughout the project to capture information more specifically about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' cultural backgrounds and needs. For

example, the development of a new PLP template that was “Indigenous-focused, with a strong emphasis on personal and cultural beliefs” (Project report, The Scots College). As part of the process of revising and updating PLPs, Indigenous students at Barker College were encouraged to reflect individually and with their family members in order to “write a letter to their teachers for the next year explaining who they are, where their Country is, what their strengths are, and if they are comfortable to be identified as Indigenous in the class and/or contribute to discussions about Indigenous issues” (Project report, Barker College).

Many schools considered the student profiles to be critical tools for teaching staff, particularly to enable differentiated teaching practices to best support individual Indigenous students. Teachers reported benefiting from being made aware of student strengths they might not see in their classrooms, as well as potential challenges and barriers to learning. The PLPs were often intended to be learning action plans for students and staff, and in some cases provided concrete interventions and strategies for teachers and support staff to use with individual students. Communication with classroom teachers as part of the PLP process included briefings from support staff at the beginning of the year on student background and context, followed up with continuing liaison throughout the year.

Students were usually given opportunities to revise learning goals throughout the year, and schools described working towards improved processes to more clearly articulate PLP information and updates to teachers and parents. There were examples of scheduled termly meetings, formal student progress meetings as required, and informal opportunities to check in with students, teachers, and family members. One school reported a once-a-term significant meeting about each Indigenous student with support staff alongside all the student’s subject teachers, pastoral care providers and boarding staff. The meeting took place in a circle, with all stakeholders starting by focusing on the student’s strengths prior to discussing strategies to address concerns (Project report, Shore). In other examples, PLPs were made available to school staff through existing student portals (Project report, Casino High School), and through novel use of digital spaces such as an Indigenous Education HUB providing centralised access to all data on enrolled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School). At Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill, a dynamic online communication database was developed for Indigenous Program staff, enabling enhanced monitoring of student progress. “Tutors, teachers, coordinators and directors are able to access and update these platforms so that student pastoral and academic situations and progress are available in real time”, increasing the capacity of all staff to provide comprehensive care for their Indigenous students (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

ii. Involvement of specialist staff

Almost all project schools (94%, n=15) specifically referred to the involvement of specialist staff in the development and implementation of targeted literacy and numeracy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. A wide range of roles and positions represented across project schools contributed to academic outcomes for Indigenous students (Table 7). For some schools, these positions were longstanding, and for others they were relatively new and exciting developments associated with participation in the project. One school reported the loss of a previously held specialist support position at the interim stage of the project, and noted the challenges associated with attempting to provide the same level of support and achieve similar outcomes for students in the absence of that critical resource. At the final stage of the project, the project team reported that the “appointment of a First Nations Learning Enrichment Teacher in 2020

has greatly benefited the consistent delivery and evaluation of First Nations students' learning outcomes" (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Several schools also commented on the value of providing Indigenous students and their family members, as well as teachers, with a "go-to person should success need sharing or if difficulties arise around academic and pastoral perspectives" (Project report, Shore).

Table 7. Specialist staff involved in literacy and numeracy support for Indigenous students

Specialist staff area	Position titles or roles reported by schools
Indigenous student support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous Coordinator - Head of Indigenous Education - Indigenous Student Coordinator - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Coordinator - Indigenous Program Coordinator - First Nations Education Coordinator and Program Facilitator - Aboriginal Engagement and Education Officer - Indigenous Support Staff - Indigenous Learning Support Teacher - Indigenous Academic Support Teacher - First Nations Learning Enrichment Teacher - Academic Mentor Indigenous Education - Literacy and Numeracy Support Worker for Indigenous students - First Nations Tutor - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Liaison - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Counsellor - Cultural tutors and mentors
Learning support and enrichment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Director of Learning - Head of Educational Services - Head of Learning Support - Learning Enrichment Coordinator - Learning Support Coordinator - Learning Enhancement Team - Learning Support Team - Learning Support Teacher - School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) - Specialist literacy teachers - Specialist numeracy teachers - Subject tutors - Speech and Language Therapist
Support specific to boarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head of Boarding - Academic tutors specific to boarding

After experiencing difficulty sourcing enough tutors to allow Indigenous students to have regular academic support sessions in 2019, one school found a solution through partnering with a local 'start-up' tutoring organisation in 2020. This enabled all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the school to receive tutoring in Maths, English tutoring for students in Years 10 to 12, and an additional weekly 'Homework Club' for Indigenous students in Years 7 to 9 (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School).

iii. Specialised literacy and numeracy programs and assessment

Specialised literacy and numeracy programs and assessments were a feature of all project schools' (100%, n=16) activities to improve academic outcomes for Indigenous students. A wide range of specialist programs, assessment tools and psychometric testing instruments were used by schools (Table 8). In total, schools referred to over 30 (n=32) programs and assessment tools, and on average each school reported using nearly five (4.8 ± 1.6) programs and tools across the entire project reporting period. The number of different specialised programs and assessment tools used to support improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students ranged from one to seven per school.

A significant portion of specialised assessment tools identified by schools were intended to establish baseline levels, identify areas of student need and measure student progress and growth in literacy and numeracy over time. Many schools embedded use of these assessment tools in their new and established processes for tracking student progress and tailoring individualised support in the form of teaching methods and resources. Several schools using tools designed for repeated measures, such as the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) and the York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC), conducted baseline assessments in 2019 and reassessed student progress in the first half of 2020.

At the interim stage of the project, the Progressive Assessment approach was identified as the most frequently used specialised literacy and numeracy assessment method, with 10 schools (63%) reporting use of at least one Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) from Mathematics and Reading. At the final reporting stage of the project, 12 schools (75%) reported use of at least one of PAT Maths and Reading with their Indigenous students. All schools were invited to submit deidentified Indigenous student data for the following key PAT Maths and Reading measures¹⁵:

- **Scale scores:** Measures of the extent of skills and knowledge required from a student to be successful on particular test items, taking item difficulty into account. Scale scores enable student achievement and test difficulty to be located on the same scale, thus providing a measure of an individual student's progress over time.
- **Percentile ranks:** The rank order and position of a student's result in relation to a norm-reference sample. For example, a percentile rank of 40 means that 40 per cent of the norm-reference sample achieved a test score lower than or equal to the test score obtained by the student. Most PAT norm-reference samples consist of Australian students from all states and territories and from all school systems.
- **Stanine scores:** A categorised score derived from percentile ranks, based on the division of a normal distribution into 9 intervals. Stanine scores range from 1 to 9 and are assigned normative descriptions of student achievement – for example, a stanine score of 1 indicates 'very low' achievement and a stanine score of 9 indicates 'very high' achievement.

¹⁵ Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd. (2011). *Interpreting ACER Test Results*, <https://www.acer.org/files/PATM-Interpreting-Scores.pdf>

Table 8. Frequency of use of literacy and numeracy programs and assessment methods, as well as psychometric testing instruments. Programs, methods, and tools are listed in order of decreasing frequency of reported use, and alphabetically.

Literacy and numeracy programs, assessment methods and psychometric testing instruments	Proportion of schools reporting use % (n)
PAT – Progressive Achievement Tests, including Reading, Mathematics and Science	75 (12)
NAPLAN – National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy	69 (11)
YARC – York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension	56 (9)
MultiLit – specific MultiLit program not specified	25 (4)
SAST – South Australian Spelling Test	25 (4)
AAS/Allwell – Academic Assessment Services, assessments not specified	19 (3)
MacqLit – Macquarie Literacy Program for Years 3+ students	19 (3)
QuickSmart – The QuickSmart Numeracy Program	19 (3)
WISC - Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children	19 (3)
CBRS Connors Comprehensive Behaviour Rating Scales	13 (2)
DIBELS – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills	13 (2)
MiniLit – MiniLit Program for K-2 students	13 (2)
BURT – Burt Word Reading Test	6 (1)
CARS and STARS – Reading and Comprehension Program	6 (1)
Education Perfect – literacy and numeracy functions	6 (1)
Fitzroy Readers	6 (1)
LFIN – Learning Framework in Number	6 (1)
LNAP – Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan screening	6 (1)
Maths Mastery Program	6 (1)
Maths Mate	6 (1)
Maths Pathways	6 (1)
MultiLit Spell It – including Gap Analysis Assessment	6 (1)
PM Benchmark Reading Assessment Resources	6 (1)
QTest – language free and culture fair tool designed to assess individual potential	6 (1)
Sound Waves – phonics and word study program	6 (1)
Sounds Write – phonics program	6 (1)
Spelling Mastery Program	6 (1)
Sustained Writing program	6 (1)
WARP – Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages	6 (1)
WordFlyers – literacy program	6 (1)
WRMT III – Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests	6 (1)

Unfortunately, unprecedented disruptions to schools due to the global COVID-19 pandemic (following extreme bushfires in some school communities), resulted in significant challenges in many aspects of school life and learning including the collection and analysis of comparative or paired data to assess student growth in literacy and numeracy. Of the 12 project schools who reported using PAT

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Maths or Reading, 67 per cent (n=8) submitted PAT data at a single time point and 33 per cent (n=4) submitted PAT data for at least two time points. This data is explored in detail in section 4.1.2.

Schools also reported using specialist programs that provided direct numeracy and literacy intervention to students, including prepared sequences of lessons, tutorials, and learning activities such as worksheets and projects. Often delivered online, programs such as MultiLit, Education Perfect, Maths Pathways and Maths Mate may be responsive to student level and progress, and therefore provided differentiated and targeted learning experiences, while also being customisable to enable alignment with student, teacher and school-specific learning programs.

iv. Targeted in-class literacy and numeracy support

Targeted literacy and numeracy support activities provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in-class and during regular school time were reported by nearly 70 per cent of project schools (69%, n=11). Most frequently, lessons consisted of small group learning in specific areas of literacy and numeracy, with a learning support teacher working with students within the classroom setting. Individualised in-class literacy and numeracy support were also described, with the frequency of this support reviewed and revised based on each “student’s level of engagement and work produced in class” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College). Withdrawal from class for small group and one-on-one tutoring outside the classroom but during class time was also reported, particularly to minimise disruption and provide more targeted support. In-class support that was fully embedded within regular classroom activities was described by a small number of schools. This support was characterised by models of inclusive teaching practices using specific differentiation within classrooms that allowed Indigenous students to participate fully in daily classroom life on the same basis as their peers. Targeted differentiation was also achieved through “streamed numeracy classes”, with lower ability classes having “smaller numbers and additional support” to facilitate meeting the needs of particular groups of students (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

Targeted classes were provided at a whole-of-year level in some schools - for example, literacy classes for all students in Year 7 and 9 to improve vocabulary and written ability for persuasive and narrative pieces, and information literacy classes for all Year 7 students to learn research and technological skills (Project report, Casino High School). Two schools described the creation of specialist classes in order to provide intensive literacy and numeracy support to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In one instance, the specialised Literacy and Numeracy support class was provided with modified assessment tasks and adjustments to support students in achieving learning outcomes (Year 7, Casino High School). In 2019, 13 of the 21 students enrolled in this specialist class were Indigenous students. Lessons were differentiated based on PLPs, with explicit teaching to build on phonemic awareness, reading, comprehension and writing skills for literacy support, and worded mathematics questions, Education Perfect and group work activities to support numeracy skills. A specialised Literacy and Learning course designed to provide additional assistance in the development and consolidation of literacy and learning skills for students with identified learning needs was also described at Pymble Ladies’ College. In 2019, two Indigenous students attended the class five times a fortnight in replacement of an elective (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).

v. Targeted literacy and numeracy support outside of class time

Many of the project schools (63%, n=10) specifically described providing additional tutoring outside of regular class time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This additional support took place at a variety of times and locations, including before and after school, during Prep time, and in the evenings in school boarding houses. Learning support provided outside of class time included one-on-one or private tutoring, tutoring sessions for pairs or small groups of students, regular study groups, and homework and reading clubs. Support was provided by a range and combination of Indigenous Program staff, Learning Support staff, internal and external subject specialist teachers and tutors, school alumni and parent volunteers. Online delivery using platforms such as Skype and Zoom also emerged for tutoring programs in 2020.

Targeted literacy and numeracy support provided outside of class time varied in frequency. Some schools described providing support to all Indigenous students in sessions ranging from 30 to 90 minutes once a week, while others described more intensive programs of two hours of evening tutoring, provided three nights a week in the boarding house. For example, The Scots College provided opportunities for guided reading sessions three mornings a week before school for Year 7 and 8 students through their “Deadly Reading Club” program, as well as Prep/Homework support sessions three times a week for all students in Years 7 to 12 (Project report, The Scots College).

The nature of the support provided, or the subject areas of focus, was student-driven in some schools, teacher-driven in others, or a flexible combination of student choice and teacher suggestions. Targeted support for Senior students included assistance with assessments, and academic skills such as exam preparation, revision, organisation, and timetabling. For example, a dynamic, student-driven exam preparation tutoring timetable described by Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill was put in place two weeks prior to examination periods. Students selected from subject-based group seminars that provided intensive exam preparation of up to 8 to 16 hours over the two-week period (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

4.1.2 Evidence of improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes

Student literacy

i. Evidence from individual project schools

Many project schools provided evidence of improved student literacy in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts, including increased confidence and improved progress and performance in literacy elements such as reading comprehension and fluency, writing, and speaking using expressive vocabulary. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students provided feedback on the value of the literacy support they received throughout the project period and reflected on their progress in literacy elements. One student commented, “the in-class support is helpful. You explain the tasks to me and put it in the most simple way I can understand” (Stage 4 Indigenous student, personal communication, Pymble Ladies’ College). Indigenous students provided feedback about specific aspects of their literacy development that had improved, such as learning to “write simple, meaningful and structured sentences” and “replace words with better synonyms” (Stage 4 Indigenous student, personal communication, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Some schools provided evidence of improved student literacy aligned with enhanced processes for developing and updating Indigenous students’ PLPs. For example, a Stage 4 student from Pymble Ladies’ College set the following goal at the start of Term 1, 2020:

To include more description in my writing and edit my work. I will do this by checking in with teachers and asking for support. This will improve my writing and my confidence as I have struggled with this skill. I will know I have achieved this goal as I will get a better feeling about my writing and my teacher will give me this feedback (Indigenous student PLP, Pymble Ladies' College).

When reflecting on how she was progressing towards this goal at the end of the project period, this student stated:

My writing has definitely improved. I now know where to put the commas and stuff. The homework activities helped me with this in English and my teacher said I was getting it right (Indigenous student PLP, Pymble Ladies' College).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students also shared positive results and expressed gratitude to staff for their support.

Just thought I'd let you know how the English assessment task went. I got a total score of 17/20 85% and ranked equal 2nd. Thank you for all of your help this term. It has made such a difference to my confidence (Indigenous student email to tutor, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Another student shared with her Indigenous Coordinator that she had received a B grade in English, and that it was her 'first B of the year thanks to you' (Stage 4 Indigenous student, email, Calrossy Anglican College).

Results from student surveys provided an indication of student opinion on their progress in literacy. Over half (54%, n=7) of students surveyed reported that their punctuation such as using capitals and full stops had improved or greatly improved throughout Terms 3 and 4 of 2019 (Student survey, Casino High School), and 83 per cent (n=5) of Year 7 students agreed or strongly agreed that their reading was improving in 2019 (Student survey, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). In the first half of 2020, all Indigenous Year 8 and 9 students surveyed (100%, n=5) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt 'eager to continue building their skills in reading' (Student survey, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how confident they felt about writing in class (with 10 highest and 1 lowest), 80 per cent (n=18) of Indigenous students chose a rating of 6 or above (Term 2 2020 student survey, Kempsey Adventist School). "This data suggests that from those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who were surveyed, the majority feel reasonably confident about their literacy competencies in class" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

Feedback from support staff and teachers working with Indigenous students suggested improved progress in literacy. Direct observation and reflection on the progress of three students who received group support with spelling twice a week, alongside a reading program once a week indicated improvements in spelling and writing:

The students found [it] difficult at first, not understanding that a letter can make several different sounds and sounds can have many different spelling patterns...As they have progressed, they began to see the spelling patterns for different words and how they change. Now, they often ask how to spell something and then say, 'hang on, let me see if I can work it out'. Their guesses are sometimes incorrect, but they are guessing spelling patterns that are closer to the words than before. This means they can work through their

writing quicker and are developing confidence with their spelling and consequently, writing (Indigenous Program staff, reflection statement, Pymble Ladies' College).

Staff with a direct role in providing learning support to Indigenous students provided valuable insights into the journey that these students had undertaken throughout the project period. The first term of learning support at Taree Christian College involved intensive one-to-one literacy support five days a week, and was described by support staff as a “a whirlwind of gathering data and getting to know the children while beginning our learning journey together” (Project report, Taree Christian College). In reporting at the end of the project period, support staff reflected that they are “now seeing the rewards of this 1:1 time with a few of the children...[who] are blossoming and the now small amount of time I have to give them is just enough to keep them going...[other students] have shown some progress but need more than the 1-2 periods a week I can offer them” (Project report, Taree Christian College).

Teachers acknowledged the value of literacy support for their Indigenous students, commenting that “some students have recorded reading a book for the first time. The Aboriginal Studies teacher indicated how much progress the Year 11 students have made in... their analytical writing and communication” (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). One teacher reflected on the benefit of a specialised Literacy and Learning course to an Indigenous student:

With regards to her literacy, she has improved especially as she initially found it difficult to write and structure her responses. As we have done a lot of writing in class, she now does not hesitate to write responses that are longer than a paragraph - she gets right into it (Teacher, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

Improvements in student confidence in literacy were also observed by family members – for example,

[Student name] success in reading is out of this world. Thank you. Reading has previously been such a long, hard road for her. This breakthrough is a huge boost to her confidence, and so critical to her other studies (Family member, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

In addition to feedback and observations on improved student literacy from teachers, support staff, family members, and Indigenous students themselves, project schools also reported evidence of improvements in academic results and class rankings featured in semesterly reports. In 2019, significant improvement in class rankings following participation in the literacy support program was reported for Indigenous students at Kinross Wolaroi School - for example, from sixth out of 12 to second out of 12 (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School). In the first semester of 2020 at Loreto Normanhurst, 80 per cent (n=5) of Aboriginal students in Year 12 achieved growth in their ranks, compared to 40 per cent (n=5) at the end of 2019, and representing a “level of academic growth greater than that experienced by 90 per cent of our year 12 cohort” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst). Improvements in academic rankings were also reported for all Year 12 Indigenous students enrolled in English Standard at Canberra Grammar School (n=3), with increases in percentile ranks from September 2019 to April 2020 ranging from 3 to 26 (Project report, Canberra Grammar School).

Some evidence of improved student literacy based on repeated assessments using specialised literacy programs was also reported by individual schools. Many schools using specialised literacy programs and assessment data had established baseline measures in 2019 and where possible,

repeated assessments during the first semester of 2020. Repeated assessment with the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC) program was conducted annually in Term 1 for Indigenous high school students at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill. In the one-year interval from Term 1 2019 to Term 1 2020, results from paired analysis showed significant mean positive growth in age equivalent years of 4.3 ± 2.3 years ($n=9$) for reading comprehension, as well as mean growth of 1.1 ± 1.9 years ($n=9$) for reading rate and 0.8 ± 0.6 years ($n=9$) for reading fluency (Analysed project report data, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Despite significant disruption due to the remote learning phase associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, YARC assessment in Term 2 2020 showed positive growth from Term 4 2019 in 75 per cent ($n=6$) of Year 7 to 9 Indigenous students at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, with growth ranging from 18 months to five years in measures of reading rate, comprehension and fluency. One student who experienced a two-year decrease in reading fluency in this period had limited access to literacy resources during the remote learning phase (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Repeated YARC assessment of Indigenous primary school students at Taree Christian College in Term 4 2019 and Term 2 2020 also showed positive growth over an 8-month period, with mean growth in age equivalent years of 1.2 ± 0.6 years ($n=4$) for reading rate and 1.0 ± 0.7 years ($n=8$) for reading accuracy (Analysed project report data, Taree Christian College).

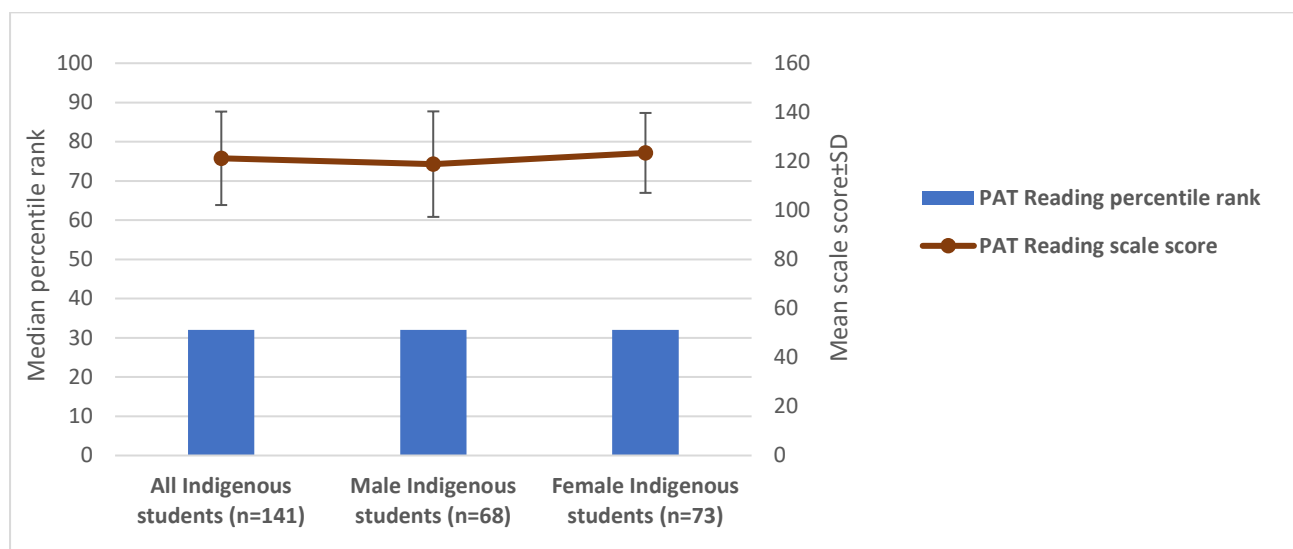
ii. Evidence from aggregate PAT Reading data

Cross-sectional analysis: Indigenous student achievement in PAT Reading

Seven of the project schools (44%) submitted PAT Reading data related to assessments performed throughout the Phase 2 project period and Term 2 2020. In total, PAT Reading data for at least one time point was reported for 141 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including 68 (48%) boys and 73 (52%) girls. Over three-quarters of these students (78%, $n=110$) were high school students in 2020, while the remaining 22 per cent ($n=31$) were primary school students. Key stage 4 was the most frequently represented stage, with nearly half of the Indigenous students with PAT Reading data reported for at least one time point (48%, $n=68$) enrolled in Years 7 or 8 in 2020.

Initial cross-sectional analysis examined a single assessment time point and was based on the most recent PAT Reading assessment results for each student. Analysis of key PAT Reading measures showed high variability in the scale scores, percentile ranks and stanine scores of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. PAT Reading scale scores ranged from 70.8 to 162.7, with a mean value of 121.2 ± 19.1 ($n=133$). PAT Reading percentile ranks ranged from one to 99, with a median percentile rank of 32 ($n=141$), and PAT Reading stanine scores ranged from one to 9 ('very low' to 'very high'), with a median stanine score of four or 'average' ($n=133$). As would be expected based on the capacity of scale scores to take test item difficulty into account, mean PAT Reading scale scores were greater in Indigenous high school students compared to Indigenous primary school students (125.8 ± 15.5 vs. 106.3 ± 22.0 , mean ranks: 74.9, 41.2, $n=133$, $Z=-4.3$, $p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney). There were no significant gender differences in Indigenous students' most recent key PAT Reading measures. Figure 7 shows median percentile ranks and mean scale scores at the latest reported PAT Reading assessment time point for all, male and female Indigenous students.

Figure 7. Median percentile ranks and mean scale scores at the latest assessment time point for all, male and female Indigenous students in the PAT Reading data sample (n=141).



It is important to note that Term 2 2020 PAT Reading data reported for 25 students was included in the dataset to enable subsequent paired analysis of student achievement at two separate time points. Prior to the inclusion of this data and due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools during Term 2 2020, analysis was undertaken to assess potential differences between aggregate PAT Reading data with and without inclusion of Term 2 2020 data. Analysis showed no significant differences in the mean ranks of Indigenous students' PAT Reading data measures (scale scores, percentile ranks and stanine scores) with and without inclusion of Term 2 2020 data. Further analysis using data from future assessment time points could be undertaken to specifically explore potential differences in Indigenous student achievement in PAT Reading measures related to Term 2 2020 disruption associated with COVID-19.

Longitudinal analysis: Growth in individual Indigenous student achievement in PAT Reading

Taking a longitudinal approach to the analysis of literacy data was essential to investigate student progress over time. Paired analysis was undertaken to explore change and potential growth in student achievement over the project period and Term 2 2020. Paired data at two PAT Reading assessment time points was identified for a total of 71 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from four project schools (Casino Christian School, Casino High School, Kempsey Adventist School, and Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Over 60 per cent (63%, n=45) of Indigenous students with paired PAT Reading data were high school students in 2020, while the remaining 37 per cent (n=26) were primary school students. Paired PAT Reading data was available for 31 (44%) boys and 40 (56%) girls. The interval between PAT Reading assessment time points ranged from one to four terms, or approximately three to 12 months. There was an interval of two or three terms between tests for over 85 per cent (86%, n=61) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with paired PAT Reading data, and an approximate mean inter-test interval of 6.2 ± 1.8 months.

Scale scores are good indicators of student progress over time since they take into consideration both the level of difficulty of the test items and the student's level of achievement, and therefore provide a common scale for tests conducted from year to year. Paired PAT Reading scale scores of Indigenous students (n=71) ranged from 59.4 to 150.2 at Time 1 (mean 116.8 ± 21.0) and from 70.8 to

156.3 at Time 2 (mean 121.0 ± 20.9). Paired analysis showed significant positive growth in individual Indigenous student achievement as measured by PAT Reading scale scores. There was a significant difference in PAT Reading scale scores between assessment time points, with higher scores observed at Time 2 compared with Time 1 (mean ranks: 63.4 vs 29.6, $Z = -3.7$, $p < 0.001$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect).

Significant growth in PAT Reading scale scores was observed for both male and female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Figures 8 and 9). Significantly higher scale scores were observed at Time 2 compared with Time 1 in available paired data for both boys (mean ranks: 67.7 vs 25.8, $n = 31$, $Z = -2.6$, $p < 0.01$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect) and girls (mean ranks: 60.0 vs 32.5, $n = 40$, $Z = -2.4$, $p < 0.01$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect).

Figure 8. Aggregate PAT Reading paired scale scores for male Indigenous students (n=31)

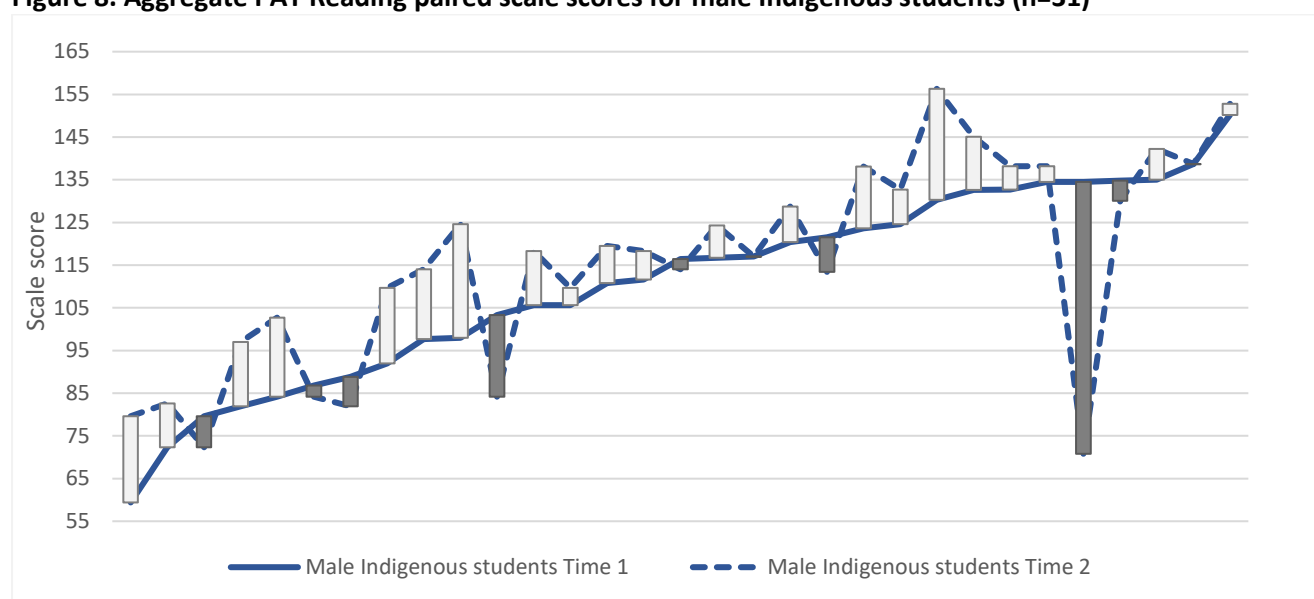
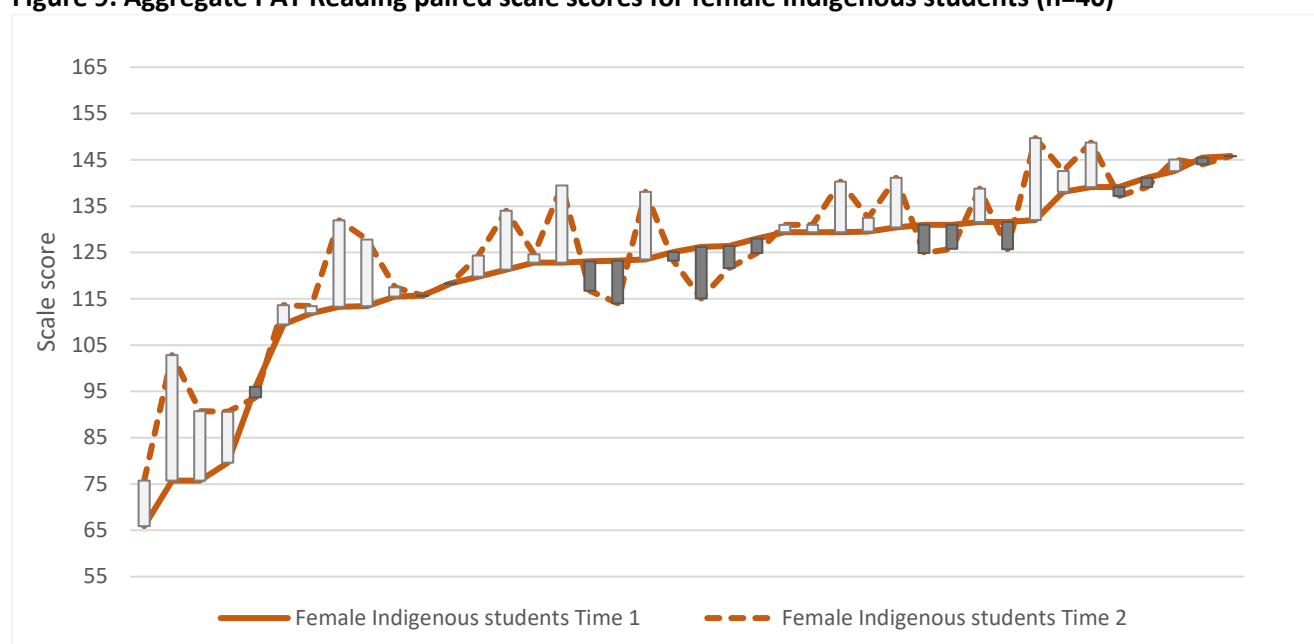
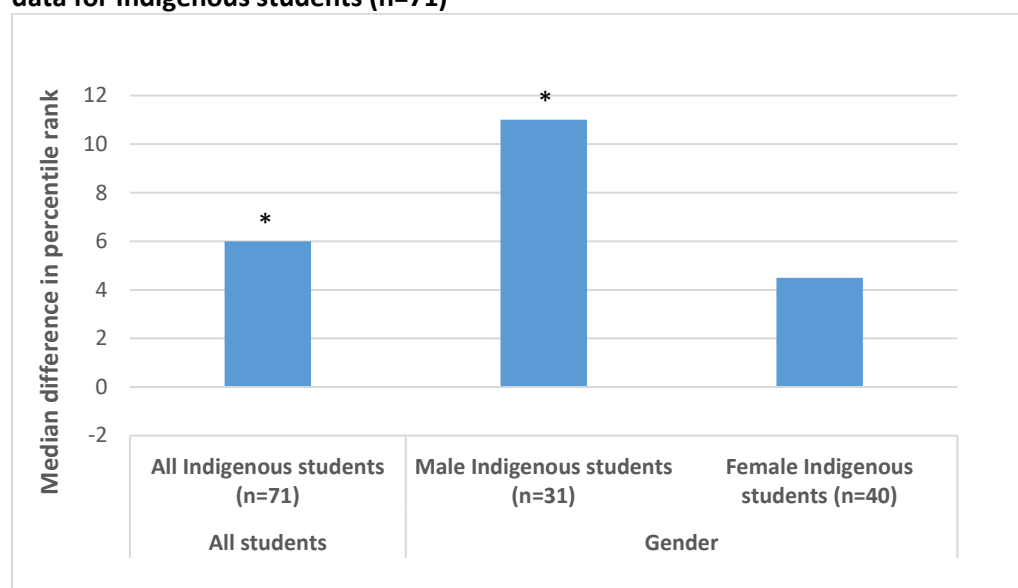


Figure 9. Aggregate PAT Reading paired scale scores for female Indigenous students (n=40)



Analysis of paired data also investigated differences in the percentile ranks achieved by Indigenous students in PAT Reading assessments at two time points. PAT Reading percentile ranks indicate the rank or position of an individual student's result relative to a norm-reference sample. Paired PAT Reading percentile ranks of Indigenous students (n=71) ranged from one to 92 at Time 1 (median 33) and from one to 95 at Time 2 (median 45). Paired analysis showed significant positive growth in individual Indigenous student achievement relative to a norm-reference sample as measured by PAT Reading percentile ranks. The median differences in percentile ranks of paired PAT Reading data are shown in Figure 10. Analysis showed significant increases in percentile ranks between the Time 1 and Time 2 PAT Reading assessments of male Indigenous students (mean ranks: 67.7 vs 25.8, n=31, $Z=-2.1$, $p<0.05$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect), and Indigenous students overall (mean ranks: 62.0 vs 32.4, n=71, $Z=-2.6$, $p<0.05$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect).

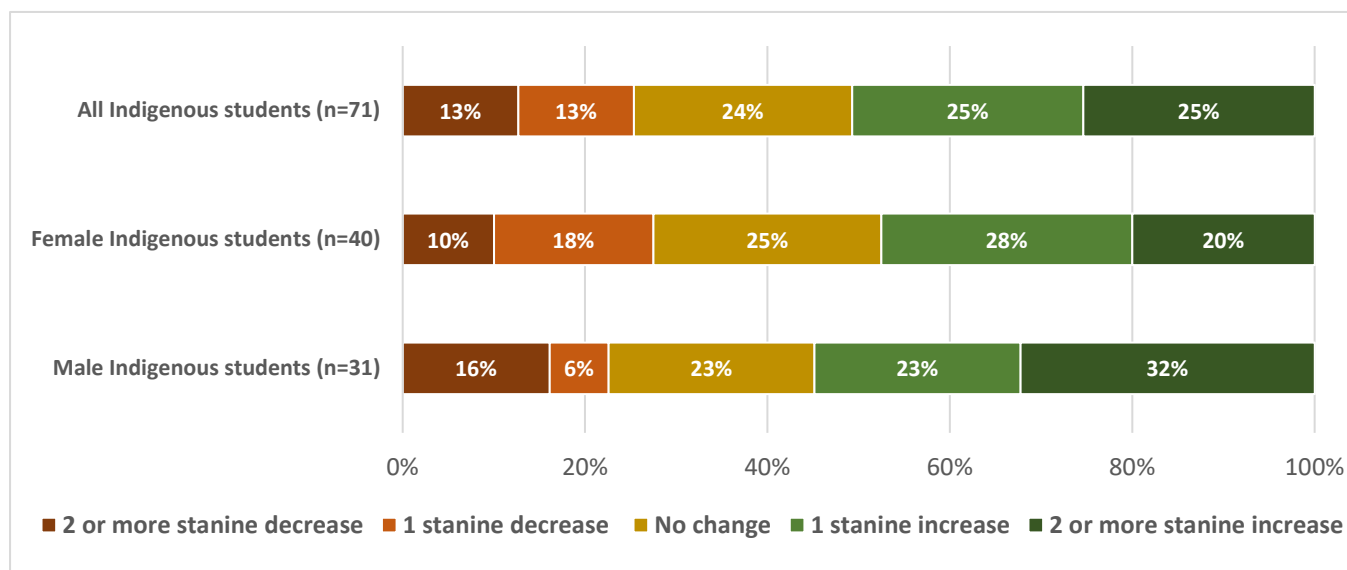
Figure 10. Median difference in percentile ranks (Time 2 – Time 1) of aggregate PAT Reading paired data for Indigenous students (n=71)



* $p<0.05$, median difference is significantly different from zero

Growth in individual Indigenous student achievement in key PAT Reading measures over time was confirmed through analysis of stanine scores. Derived from percentile ranks, stanine scores provide schools with a helpful way of grouping student results and providing broad descriptors of student achievement including 'very low', 'low', 'below average', 'average', 'above average', 'high' and 'very high'. Paired PAT Reading stanine scores of Indigenous students (n=71) ranged from one ('very low') to eight ('high') at Time 1 (median 4, 'average') and from one ('very low') to eight ('high') at Time 2 (median 5, 'average'). The proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students overall, and male and female Indigenous students, with one or two stanine score decreases, no change in stanine scores and one or two stanine score increases across the project period and Term 2 2020 are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Growth in Indigenous students' stanine scores in aggregate PAT Reading paired data (Time 2 – Time 1)



Testing guidelines suggest that differences in student achievement measured at two or more stanines are indicative of significant differences in student performance. Overall, half (50%, n=36) of Indigenous students in the paired sample achieved growth of at least one stanine in PAT Reading assessments, and one quarter (25%, n=18) achieved growth of two or more stanines. Paired analysis showed significant positive growth in individual Indigenous student achievement as measured by PAT Reading stanine scores (mean ranks: 50.7 vs 25.4, n=71, $Z=-2.1$, $p<0.05$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, small effect).

Student numeracy

i. Evidence from individual project schools

Considerable work towards improved student confidence and achievement in numeracy was reported across all 16 project schools. Although evidence of progress was less substantial than that provided for improvements in literacy, feedback and reflections from teachers, support staff, and students indicated progress in numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

I'm so proud of [student name] effort in Mathematics this Semester, she has received the highest score for her assessment in the class (Teacher, Calrossy Anglican College).

Just to let you know that both students performed very well in the Maths Assessment at the end of last term. They were both very happy with their marks and ranks and both improved dramatically (Learning Support staff, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

One school reported significant individual progress that resulted in an Indigenous student moving to a higher level of Mathematics in the following year.

Recently, he has really applied himself in lessons and has managed to improve his classroom behaviour and commitment to his studies. I have spoken to him about moving up a class in Year 8 (into the mainstream Mathematics cohort) as I think he now has the maturity and knowledge to do so... He scored 79% in his latest Mathematics Assessment, which is very promising and really well done (Teacher, feedback, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commented on how beneficial specialised programs and learning support had been for their numeracy generally, and also for their understanding of specific numeracy elements.

The QuickSmart program with [support teacher name] has helped me a lot with my math (Stage 4 First Nations student, feedback, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

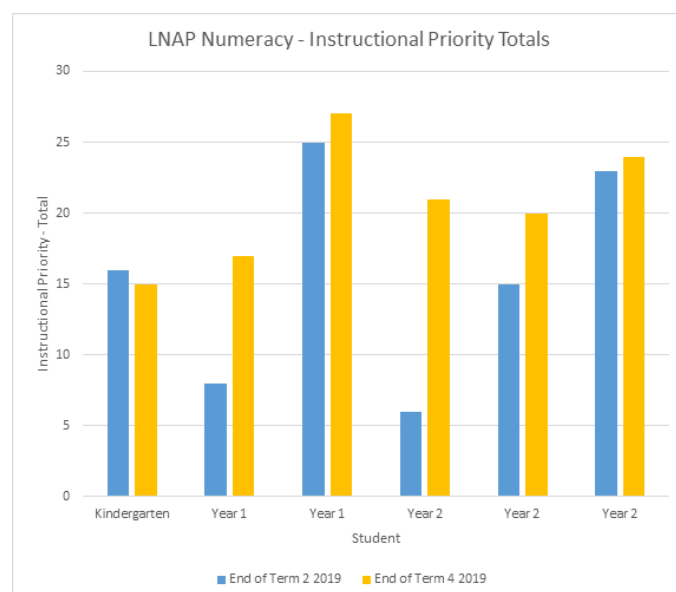
[Support teacher name] is awesome. She has been helping me with the structure of maths questions and scaffolding how to answer test questions. She's the best (Indigenous student, feedback, Pymble Ladies' College).

The session with [support teacher name] was really helpful. She helped me work through probability which I was really struggling with (Indigenous student, feedback, Pymble Ladies' College).

Numeracy was a common area that Indigenous students indicated they would like to improve, and it featured prominently in many personalised learning plans and profiles. Schools' student survey results indicated that Indigenous students felt they were making progress in this area, with 100 per cent (n=4) of Year 7 and 9 students agreeing or strongly agreeing that their 'Maths skills are improving', (Student survey, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview), and 100 per cent (n=4) of students reporting that Maths was the area of studies they felt they had improved the most in the last six months (Student survey, Calrossy Anglican College). When asked to rate on a scale of one to 10 how confident they felt about doing Maths in class (with 10 highest and one lowest), 70 per cent (n=14) of Indigenous students surveyed at Kempsey Adventist School rated seven or above. "This data suggests that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students surveyed feel confident about their numeracy competencies in class" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

Some evidence of improved student numeracy based on assessments using specialised programs was also reported by individual schools. Figure 12 shows progress in student numeracy from Term 2 to Term 4 2019 demonstrated by improvement trends in 16 instructional priorities for five out of six Indigenous primary school students at Casino Christian School (Project report, LNAP mastery data, Casino Christian School).

Figure 12. LNAP Numeracy data for Stage 1 Indigenous students at Casino Christian School



Repeated assessment with the QuickSmart program following a four month inter-test interval showed decreases in the time taken by a student to complete addition equations from 5.1 seconds to 4.8 seconds, from 9.0 seconds to 4.7 seconds for subtraction equations, and from 3.6 seconds to 2.4 seconds for multiplication equations (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Maths Pathways program data at Kempsey Adventist College was collated for Indigenous students in Years 7 to 10. Results showed average growth rates of at least 50 per cent for over half (53%, $n=18$) of students assessed, with growth rates ranging from 50 to 100 per cent. "The level of growth rate identified by the Maths Pathways data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students in Years 7 to 10 suggests that the program is achieving progress in numeracy, to some extent, for these students" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

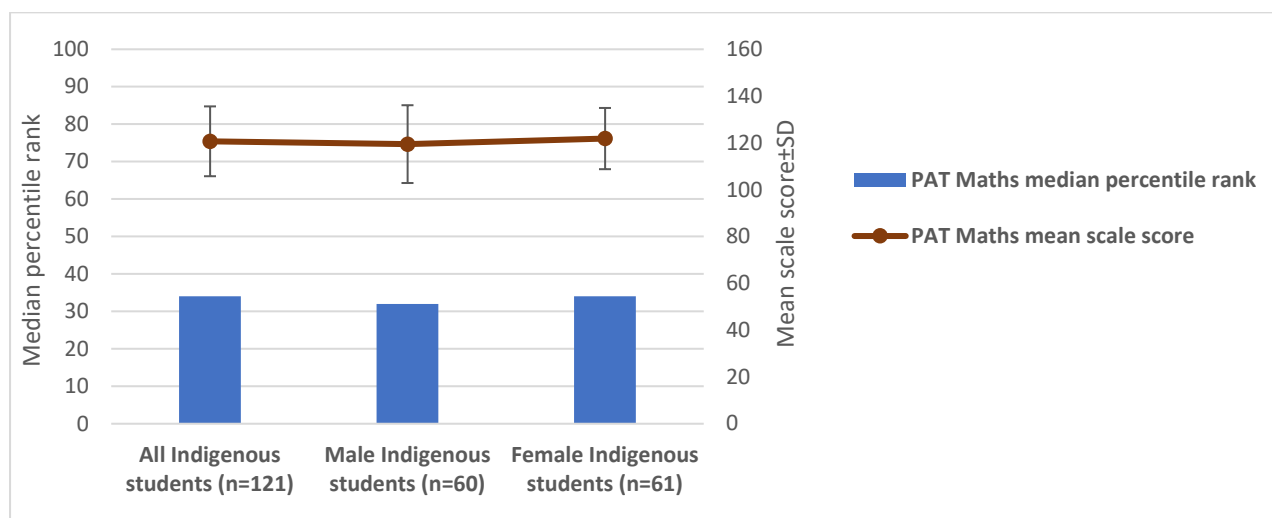
ii. Evidence from aggregate PAT Maths data

Cross-sectional analysis: Indigenous student achievement in PAT Maths

Half of the project schools (50%, $n=8$) submitted PAT Maths data related to assessments performed throughout the Phase 2 project period and Term 2 2020. In total, PAT Maths data for at least one time point was reported for 121 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including 60 (50%) boys and 61 (50%) girls. Nearly three-quarters of these students (74%, $n=90$) were high school students in 2020, while the remaining 26 per cent ($n=31$) were primary school students. Key stage 4 was the most frequently represented stage, with 39 per cent ($n=47$) of these Indigenous students enrolled in Years 7 or 8 in 2020.

Initial cross-sectional analysis examined a single assessment time point and was based on the most recent PAT Maths assessment results for each student. Analysis of key PAT Maths measures showed high variability in the scale scores, percentile ranks and stanine scores of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. PAT Maths scale scores ranged from 79.0 to 158.7, with a mean value of 120.7 ± 14.9 ($n=113$). PAT Maths percentile ranks ranged from one to 98, with a median percentile rank of 34 ($n=121$). Finally, PAT Maths stanine scores ranged from one to nine ('very low' to 'very high'), with a median stanine score of four or 'average' ($n=113$). As would be expected based on the capacity of scale scores to take test item difficulty into account, mean PAT Maths scale scores were greater in Indigenous high school students compared to Indigenous primary school students (124.8 ± 12.0 vs. 109.8 ± 16.5 , mean ranks: 65.5, 34.4, $n=113$, $Z=-4.5$, $p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney Test). There were no significant gender differences in Indigenous students' key PAT Maths measures analysed at a single and most recent assessment time point. Figure 13 shows median percentile ranks and mean scale scores at the latest reported PAT Maths assessment time point for all Indigenous students, Indigenous boys, and Indigenous girls.

Figure 13. Median percentile ranks and mean scale scores at the latest reported assessment time point for all, male and female Indigenous students in the PAT Maths data sample (n=121).



Similar to the process undertaken with PAT Reading data, Term 2 2020 PAT Maths data was included to enable subsequent paired analysis of student achievement at two separate time points. This occurred less frequently for PAT Maths compared to PAT Reading data, with 12 students for whom Term 2 2020 data was the only available second assessment time point reported. Prior to the inclusion of this data and due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools during Term 2 2020, analysis was undertaken to assess potential differences between aggregate PAT Maths data with and without inclusion of Term 2 2020 data. Analysis showed no significant differences in the mean ranks of Indigenous students' PAT Maths data measures (scale scores, percentile ranks and stanine scores) with and without inclusion of Term 2 2020 data. Further analysis using data from future assessment time points could be undertaken to specifically explore potential differences in Indigenous student achievement in PAT Maths measures related to Term 2 2020 disruption associated with COVID-19.

Longitudinal analysis: Growth in individual Indigenous student achievement in PAT Maths

Paired analysis was also undertaken to explore change and potential growth in student achievement in PAT Maths over the project period and Term 2 2020. Paired data at two PAT Maths assessment time points was identified for a total of 57 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from four project schools (Casino Christian School, Casino High School, Kempsey Adventist School, and Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Just over 50 per cent (54%, n=31) of Indigenous students with paired PAT Maths data were high school students in 2020, while the remaining 46 per cent (n=26) were primary school students. Paired PAT Maths data was available for 27 (47%) boys and 30 (53%) girls. Similar to the paired PAT Reading data, the inter-test interval for PAT Maths assessment time points ranged from one to four terms, or approximately three to 12 months. There was an interval of two or three terms between tests for over 95 per cent (96%, n=55) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with paired PAT Maths data, resulting in an approximate mean inter-test interval of 6.9 ± 1.6 months.

The availability of paired data was lower for PAT Maths compared with PAT Reading assessments, resulting in a smaller paired sample. Results from analysis of sub-cohorts need to be interpreted with caution due to this smaller sample size – for example, analysis of paired Maths data by gender.

As with PAT Reading, PAT Maths scale scores provided a common achievement scale for tests conducted from year to year. Paired PAT Maths scale scores of Indigenous students ($n=57$) ranged from 88.2 to 151.7 at Time 1 (mean 117.5 ± 14.1) and from 79.0 to 158.7 at Time 2 (mean 118.8 ± 16.6). Paired analysis showed no significant difference in PAT Maths scale scores measured at two assessment time points in the paired Indigenous student sample overall. There was, however, a significant difference in PAT Maths scale scores between assessment time points in female Indigenous students, with higher scores observed at Time 2 compared with Time 1 (mean ranks: 73.3 vs 26.7, $Z=-2.2$, $p<0.05$, Wilcoxon signed rank test, moderate effect, Figure 14). There was no significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2 PAT Maths scale scores in male Indigenous students (Figure 15).

Figure 14. Aggregate PAT Maths paired scale scores for female Indigenous students ($n=30$)

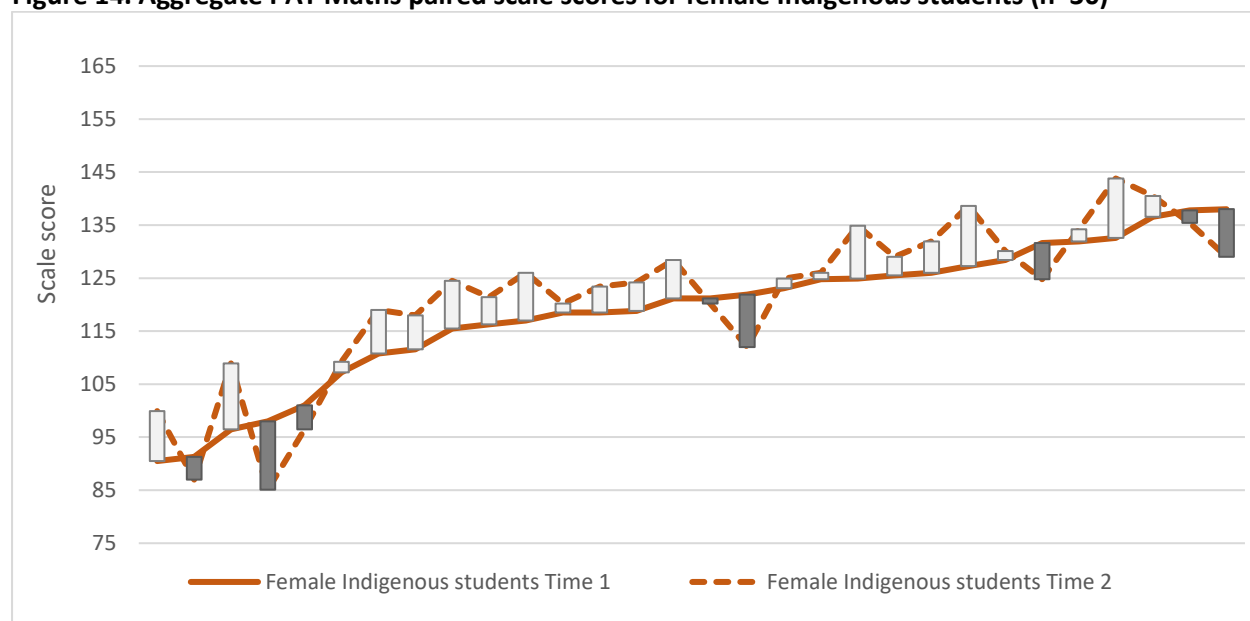
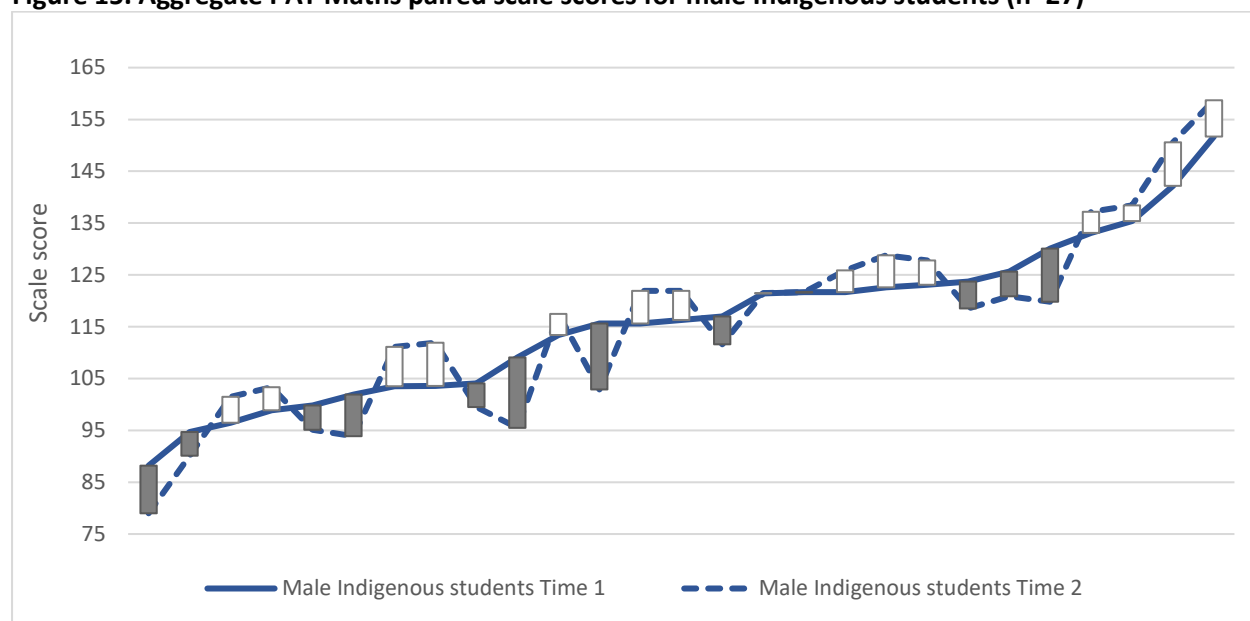
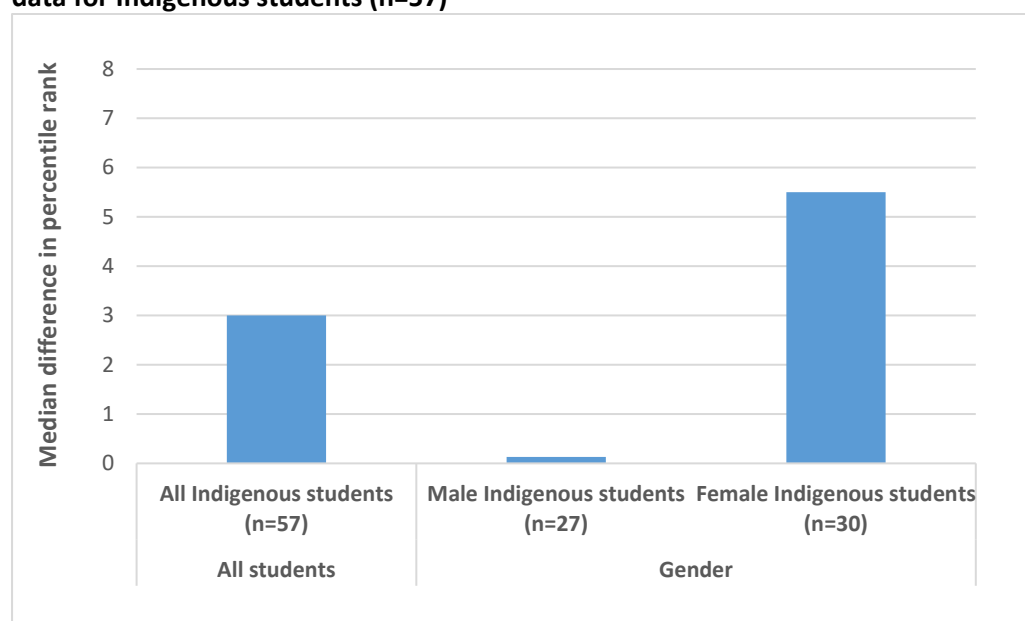


Figure 15. Aggregate PAT Maths paired scale scores for male Indigenous students ($n=27$)



Analysis of paired data also investigated differences in PAT Maths percentile ranks, or position of an individual student's results relative to a norm-reference sample. Paired PAT Maths percentile ranks of Indigenous students (n=57) ranged from nine to 93 at Time 1 (median 38) and from one to 95 at Time 2 (median 41). Paired analysis showed no significant difference in individual Indigenous student achievement relative to a norm-reference sample as measured by PAT Maths percentile ranks at Time 1 and Time 2. The median differences in percentile ranks of paired PAT Maths data are shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Median difference in percentile ranks (Time 2 – Time 1) of aggregate PAT Maths paired data for Indigenous students (n=57)

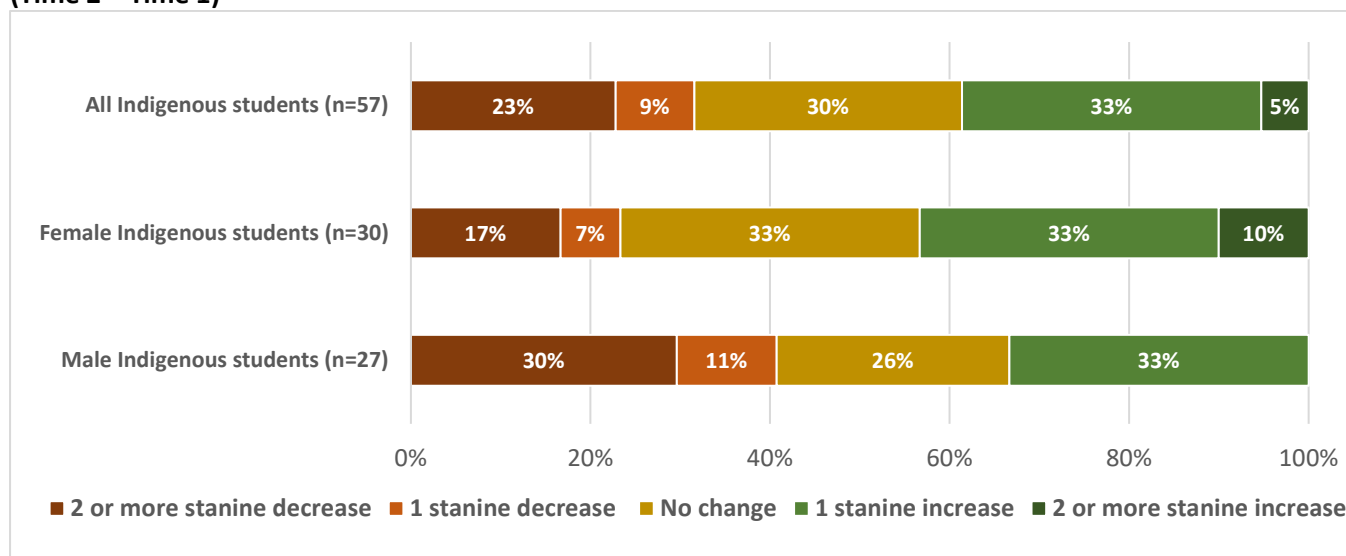


*p<0.05, median difference is significantly different from zero

Derived from percentile ranks, stanine scores provide a mechanism for grouping student results in relation to a norm-reference sample, and providing broad descriptors of student achievement including 'very low', 'low', 'below average', 'average', 'above average', 'high' and 'very high'. Paired PAT Maths stanine scores of Indigenous students (n=57) ranged from two ('low') to eight ('high') at Time 1 (median 4, 'average') and from one ('very low') to nine ('very high') at Time 2 (median 5, 'average').

The proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students overall, and male and female students with one or two stanine score decreases, no change in stanine scores and one or two stanine score increases across the project period and Term 2 2020 are shown in Figure 17. Nearly 40 per cent (38%, n=22) of Indigenous students in the paired sample achieved growth of at least one stanine in PAT Maths assessments, and 5 per cent (n=3) achieved growth of two or more stanines. Overall, analysis showed no significant difference in Time 1 and Time 2 PAT Maths stanine scores of the paired Indigenous student sample. A decrease in at least one stanine was observed in about 40 per cent (41%, n=11) of the male Indigenous students in the paired sample. These results need to be interpreted with caution due to the smaller sample sizes of male and female Indigenous students with available paired PAT Maths data.

Figure 17. Growth in Indigenous students' stanine scores in aggregate PAT Maths paired data (Time 2 – Time 1)



Student engagement

Schools provided evidence that strategies and activities to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes had also resulted in increased engagement in learning, including enhanced interest, motivation, and commitment to studies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Students were reported to be “taking a much more active role in their classes, in Year group meetings in their House groups and in smaller meetings with Senior staff” (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). Teachers commented that students were increasingly “really engaged” and demonstrating “increased focus” (Teacher feedback, email, Calrossy Anglican College and Pymble Ladies’ College), and were to be commended for their “engagement in lessons”, “willingness to ask questions in order to consolidate learning” and for “making excellent use of class time to complete work and to follow up with any difficulties encountered” (Student report feedback, Canberra Grammar School). Teachers also described students’ improved behaviour and decision-making, including making a “genuine effort to not be distracted by others and to participate fully” in class (Teacher feedback, email, Pymble Ladies’ College).

Increased engagement was reflected in increased student application or effort ratings in over half of Indigenous students assessed at some schools – for example, improvements in Application Point Average, a rating based on effort in classwork and homework, in eight out of 13 students (Project report, Knox Grammar School), and improvements in effort ratings in four out of six Senior students (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). Teachers also reflected on significant changes in individual students, for example:

The last time I taught [student name] was in Year 9, the difference is absolutely astounding! He is fully engaged in every single lesson, he listens attentively, asks questions where he does not understand and works productively in class... (Teacher, email, Knox Grammar School).

One of my students has gone from being completely disengaged and ranking towards the bottom of the class, to doing hours of revision at home using [Education Perfect] and ranking in the top three. (Teacher, direct communication, Casino High School).

Schools also reported evidence that Indigenous students were enjoying being involved in specific support programs and attending voluntary learning support offerings more frequently. Average Indigenous student attendance at voluntary tutoring offered to Indigenous students in the boarding house was 83 per cent in Term 1 2020 (Project report, Barker College), and attendance at a 'Homework Club' increased from 12 to 50 percent from Term 4 2019 to Term 2 2020 (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School).

In a focus group discussion with Stage 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students there was an "overwhelming response that they were enjoying the intervention groups with the literacy and numeracy worker" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College). Stage 1 students working with a learning support teacher at Taree Christian College were reported to "enjoy reading aloud to the support teacher and receiving individual attention" and were "keen to participate" (Teacher survey via email, Taree Christian College). One Indigenous student shared that it was sometimes "hard to garner the motivation to continue with boarding tutoring, but once sitting down to work it is useful", and also reported feeling as though they "miss tutoring on days it is not held" (Report of Indigenous student interview, Barker College).

Academic preparedness

Progress towards positive outcomes for Indigenous students in areas of academic self-management skills and preparedness, such as goal setting, study skills, time management, and stress management was also reported by project schools. Students gained experience in goal setting through the consultation process to develop PLPs at many schools, and received targeted support in exam preparation, time management, and balancing school with sporting commitments. Indigenous students commented that they "found it easier to stay on top of their work since the program has been available to them" and reported feeling more "eased" or relaxed about their academic workloads (Report of Indigenous student interview, Barker College). Students identified organisational skills as particularly helpful aspects of learning support programs, for example:

I would like to continue using [support teacher name] next Term as I felt I was on top of all my work, getting organised for tasks. It was helpful (Stage 5 Indigenous student, feedback, Calrossy Anglican School).

Thanks so much for your support. These sessions have been really useful in helping me to organise my notes for English (Indigenous student, feedback, Pymble Ladies' College).

Teachers and support staff highlighted the importance and evidence of improved academic preparedness for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

It is pleasing to see [student name] mature into an independent thinking and confident young man. He has worked hard to improve his academic performance through a focus on his organisational and study skills, and this has seen a significant increase in his APA scores and excellent results in Mathematics and Geography Assessments (Mentor comment, Knox Grammar School).

For most of our boys, their greatest need (and it is essential for independent learning) is their ability to organise themselves. I am pleased that as each week goes by, we see greater initiative and independence from our boys. It is wonderful to see that with their efforts, grades are also improving (The Message Stick, The Scots College Indigenous Education Program Newsletter Issue 3, The Scots College).

Family members of Indigenous students also observed increased academic preparedness through additional support provided through the project, and shared the positive impact of these skills on students' anxiety and stress levels, for example:

In Year 10 we were nearly at the point of non-attending due to general unease/anxiety with exams. [Student name] is now feeling well prepared, she is checking her understanding/identifying areas that she needs support on with the tutor and working through strategies. Just wanted to share this change in behaviour and believe that the extra support has made a significant difference for our [student name] this term (Parent of Indigenous student, email, Barker College).

Academic confidence and expectations of academic outcomes

Several schools reported evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were feeling more confident about their academic ability generally. Survey results at the interim reporting stage showed that over 60 per cent of parents (63%, n=23) of Indigenous students agreed or strongly agreed that their child felt 'more confident and comfortable about their academic work than they used to' (Parent survey, aggregate data, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Calrossy Anglican College and Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Parents were surveyed in Term 4 2019 and again in Term 1 2020 at Kinross Wolaroi School, and results showed that the proportion of parents of Indigenous students who agreed or strongly agreed that their child felt more confident and comfortable about their academic work than they used to increased from 66 per cent (n=6) to 100 per cent (n=9) (Parent survey data, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Indigenous students were also surveyed and provided with opportunities to reflect on their own learning. Results showed improved academic confidence, with 93 per cent (n=27) of students surveyed agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt 'more confident about their academic work than they used to' (Student survey, aggregate data, Kinross Wolaroi School, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill), and over 80 per cent (82%, n=14) agreeing or strongly agreeing that the support provided improved their academic progress (Student survey data, Kinross Wolaroi School). Eighty per cent (n=4) of Year 8 Indigenous students at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview agreed or strongly agreed that they felt 'much more confident with learning this year', and 67 per cent (n=4) of the Year 7 students agreed they 'felt confident asking and answering questions in class' (Student survey, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Comments from Indigenous primary school students surveyed at Casino Christian School revealed confidence in their learning and self-belief that they could continue to improve:

School has been going very well. I started school and I've been getting better and better at it. I'm a lot better at reading and writing. I'm good at Maths (Stage 1 Indigenous student, Casino Christian School).

I've got better at Maths and English this year. I can learn lots of things (Stage 1 Indigenous student, Casino Christian School).

Teachers and support staff observed increased confidence in Indigenous students and commented on how that was leading to a noticeable shift in engagement and level of comfort in the classroom and school environment.

It's exciting to see [student name] come out of his shell and be confident and just to see him be him! (Teacher, direct communication, Taree Christian College).

It's also that idea of seeing that support in the smaller classes with Wingaru, seeing the new students coming into their own and actually asking questions and becoming a bit more vocal, just that confidence in their ability to ask questions and they're doing everything, you know, they're striving so hard, and it's just lovely to see (Learning support staff, staff focus group, Barker College).

Increased academic confidence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was also evidenced by signs that student and staff expectations of what students are capable of had increased as well.

[Student name] asked to change their HSC subject choice from Standard English to Advanced English as they wanted to take on the more challenging subject and believed that they would find more enjoyment at the "more difficult and more interesting level" (Indigenous Projects staff, personal communication, Barker College).

At Shore, termly meetings about individual Indigenous students commenced with a positive strengths-based discussion about the student. "Hearing that these students have strengths that may not be visible in their class, has started a shift in the deficit paradigm that was present before the project" (Project report, Shore). Staff also responded positively to seeing Indigenous students aim for external opportunities such as school exchange or work experience programs.

I was really impressed with the quality of the conversations I had with all four applicants and their partners for the cultural immersion. The improvement in confidence... was amazing! I was shocked (in a good way) with how articulate they both were. The transformation in [student name], where is the shy girl, now a proud young Aboriginal woman (School leader, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

Critical shifts in both student and teacher expectations of academic outcomes for Indigenous students has occurred through the projects.

Satisfaction with academic support

Several schools reported levels of student and parent satisfaction with academic support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by the school. Survey results provided baseline measures that project teams will be able to compare with future findings, and in some instances, have already initiated changes to existing programs in order to address issues and enhance academic support. Seventy-five per cent (n=15) of Indigenous students surveyed at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill in 2019, strongly agreed that they had access to a range of support for their academic work, and 63 per cent (n=12) strongly agreed that the support provided had helped them improve academically. Students commented that the support provided had helped with "grades", "work and assignments", and "revision". One student reflected that he had "been given the option of extra tutoring sessions and this has pushed [him] to work harder" (Student survey data, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill). Student surveys conducted in Term 4 2019 and again in Term 1 2020 showed increased student satisfaction with academic support at Kinross Wolaroi School, with a 25 per cent increase in the proportion of Indigenous students who strongly agreed that they had access to a range of support for their academic progress (Student survey data, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Surveys of family awareness and satisfaction with academic support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students provided important insights into opportunities to improve communication about support with both parents and students. Over 80 per cent (n=26) of parents surveyed at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill and Macquarie Anglican Grammar School in 2019 agreed or strongly

agreed that their child had access to a range of support for their academic work, and that this support had helped their child improve academically (Parent survey, aggregate data, Saint Joseph's College and Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Two-thirds (67%, n=6) of parents surveyed in Term 4 2019 at Kinross Wolaroi School agreed or strongly agreed that their child had access to a range of academic support, and one parent disagreed and commented that the academic support had "not really been communicated with them". Survey results in Term 1 2020 showed increased parent satisfaction with academic support, with all parents surveyed (100%, n=9) agreeing or strongly agreeing that their child had access to a range of academic support, and one parent commenting that they were "just so happy with everything provided so far" (Parent survey data, Kinross Wolaroi School). All parents of transitioning Indigenous students at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview (100%, n=9) agreed or strongly agreed that the support their child was receiving from the staff in Learning Enrichment was helping their literacy and numeracy skills (Parent survey data, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

5. Progress towards other educational, sociocultural and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

In addition to literacy, numeracy and other academic outcomes, project schools demonstrated progress towards other educational, sociocultural and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Key areas of progress included improved transition experiences into the school and boarding environment, increased aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities and strengthened connection to and pride in Indigenous culture. Many schools also highlighted the connections between progress towards these outcomes and improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

5.1 Students experience a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment (Outcome 2)

5.1.1 Strategies and activities promoting a positive and successful transition experience for Indigenous students into the school and boarding environment

Strategies

Many project schools recognised the importance of supporting successful transition into the school and boarding environment to ensure that Indigenous students experienced the best possible start to this new chapter of their educational journeys and lives. Schools identified that a successful transition into the school is “crucial to the project’s overall success” (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview), a “vital first step”, and that “other initiatives will have no opportunity to emerge if this is not achieved” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College). Several schools had focused considerable attention and effort to improving the support for new Indigenous students and their families to experience a positive transition into the school community.

Activities

Activities undertaken by project schools to support positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment included:

- school staff visits to Indigenous students’ home school, family, and community prior to commencement
- Indigenous student and family visits to the school prior to commencement, including orientation events
- regular communication and support with application and enrolment processes
- completion of student profiles and learning plans prior to commencement
- targeted support or mentoring from staff and peers.

One project staff person’s description of their school’s transition program provides an informative overview of what the above strategies to support student transition look like in practice:

So once the students have been identified to progress to the interview, I went on a bit of a road trip over about two or three days. I drove to the home communities, we arranged to have time in the homes, which was seriously just enjoying a cup of tea, having a

conversation with Mum or Dad, or grandparents were there on some occasions as well. And so we just had a big conversation for half an hour and then for roughly about maybe 25-30 minutes I did a YARC with them as well to give us something to work through. That was just an activity while I was there, which gave me something to bring back. And so, I just went round each place and a couple of them were within the same town. And then that evening, we went out for dinner. So both of those families we got together, shared a meal, some conversations, and discussed collectively, what were their anxieties or worries, what were their excitements for the kids and the families and it was just a really relaxed, really informal opportunity to discuss life, but then also include the students and their progression....And then they also then came back to the school and had their school interviews post that which meant when they came and sat with the principal for interview, I'm sitting there with someone that immediately made them feel more relaxed, the student and the parents, and that was a far more positive experience (Interviewee 1).

i. School staff visits to Indigenous students' home school, family, and community prior to commencement

Visits by school staff to the home communities of prospective Indigenous students were described as the "most important activity undertaken by staff in supporting the transition of First Nations students" (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). The intentional outcomes of these visits were to "build connections and establish communication networks between student, family, community" and the school prior to transitioning (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Interviews with students formed an important part of these visits, taking place "in their homes in an informal conversational manner" (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School), or "on Country in a culturally safe place" (Project report, Knox Grammar School). These visits also allowed staff members to meet and engage with each students' entire support network, including parents and carers, community Elders, and primary or feeder school principals and teachers.

ii. Indigenous student and family visits to the school prior to commencement, including orientation events

Many schools reported several and varied opportunities for future Indigenous students and their family members to visit the school prior to commencement. These visits included both formal events intended for all new Indigenous students and family members attending the school as a group, as well as informal personalised visits for individual students and family members. Formal events included orientation days and weeks held at the school, usually at the end of the term prior to the new students' commencement date – for example, in November prior to a February commencement. During these events, Indigenous students and family members had the opportunity to connect with other future Indigenous students and their families, meet key staff members who would be directly involved with student care and support, and learn how to navigate school facilities and routines. Indigenous students who were transitioning into a boarding environment could also reside in the boarding house during these orientation events. In addition to formal events, some schools encouraged Indigenous students and their families to visit the school a few times before commencement, allowing for personalised visits and direct assistance with information deemed relevant to the students' circumstances and needs.

iii. Regular communication and support with application and enrolment processes

In addition to visits to and from Indigenous students and their families, project schools described regular communication and support for application and enrolment processes as vital activities to support positive and successful transition experiences for this cohort. School staff such as the Head of Indigenous Education, First Nations Education Coordinator, and the Head of Boarding were in regular phone and email communication to support family members with application and enrolment paperwork and logistics, including organising AbStudy payments, travel arrangements, and school uniform, stationary, and technology requirements.

iv. Completion of student profiles and learning plans prior to commencement

A form of personalised learning plan, profile, or pathway (PLP) was previously identified as the most prominent feature of schools' individualised and targeted approach to literacy and numeracy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (see 4.1.1). Several network schools incorporated the development of the PLP into their strategies to support the successful transition of Indigenous students and their family members into the school environment. These schools emphasised early development of personalised plans for students through collection of information from students, family members and feeder schools throughout the enrolment process and prior to commencement. All relevant documentation, such as school reports, NAPLAN results, school and community references, and birth certificates, was collected by the school as part of the application and enrolment process. Interviews with students, and in some cases results from psychometric testing, conducted during visits to or from the school prior to commencement, informed the development of academic and cultural profiles of incoming Indigenous students.

v. Targeted support or mentoring from staff and peers

The involvement of targeted support from specialist staff was highlighted as part of the support provided for transition into the school and boarding environment. Providing a designated support person for Indigenous students throughout their transition was intended to communicate to students that there was always someone they could reach out to for support with any questions or issues. Schools also facilitated academic and emotional support from peers, with regular groups for Indigenous students from across school years, and targeted support through mentoring or buddy programs initiated prior to commencement.

5.1.2 Evidence of Indigenous students experiencing a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment

Staff awareness and understanding of support required for successful transition

Activities undertaken by schools to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their transition to the school and boarding environment resulted in increased staff awareness and understanding of individual student needs, capabilities, and culture. For some staff, the home and community visits were profound experiences, deepening their understanding of the student's home environment, and in turn contributing to the staff person's capacity to support informed and culturally aware relationships between home and school:

....me having been there, feeling, experiencing, it's hard to explain that.... how can I put that into words? There's a feeling you get when you go visit people in community and when

you're on other people's Country. And to get a feel for people definitely gives me a greater sense of how, how to explain what to expect from their families. And the commitment and connection that the parents and family will have with the child's education (Interviewee 1).

Staff articulated their appreciation to project staff for opportunities to meet future students through transition support activities.

Thanks for meeting with me to discuss [student name], it has given me a much more holistic view of him before he starts in my boarding house next year (Boarding leader, email, Kinross Wolaroi School).

I wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to meet with our new and prospective Indigenous students. It has been really good getting to know them a bit better and I hope this will also help the transition process for the girls. I have been able to take some good notes which I can also share with the Boarding staff...I look forward to getting to know all of them a bit better next year! (Boarding leader, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

Schools reported evidence that teachers and boarding staff had improved understanding of Indigenous students' learning capabilities and needs due to access to prior academic data such as school reports and NAPLAN results, as well as results from psychometric and standardised testing conducted prior to commencement as part of the school's transition process. Testing of Indigenous students prior to commencement was reported to provide staff with "a global picture of the students and how the school can best support their learning and transition" (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Consultation with key staff from Indigenous students' previous schools – that is, teachers, pastoral care staff and Year advisors, was also useful in "providing feedback on a student's development, strengths, and challenges" (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Combined with completed PLPs, work samples, and testing results, feedback from feeder schools was made available to and discussed with staff in advance of Indigenous students' arrival at schools to enable appropriate class placement and ensure that targeted academic supports were already in place when students commenced.

Staff also indicated improved understanding of Indigenous students' needs by "getting to know them and their families prior to their arrival" at the school (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College). Family members responded positively to communication with schools throughout transition, and to schools' requests for more information about prospective Indigenous student's personal interests and culture.

Thank you for requesting to get to know [student name] better before I submit an application... [Student name] is a very social person and is able to make and keep friends for a long time. He is talkative, inquisitive and a thinker. He plays AFL... likes reading, swimming and athletics. He is also well supported by extended family. He is strong in his culture (Carer of an Indigenous student, email, Knox Grammar School).

One school reported that increased "knowledge and learning about [students'] Aboriginal history and culture empowered staff to approach [each student] without assumptions and as individuals" (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Increased quantity and quality of background information about Indigenous students resulted in improved staff confidence and capacity to support students throughout their transition to the school and boarding environment. This increased understanding

and knowledge resulted in overall smoother transition experiences for the students, and also benefited staff:

The new students coming into Year 7, I feel like they were better prepared to be at the school than previously. And the impact of that was that I think...our [boarding house] staff and students alike, I think the preparation done beforehand, meant we had a better experience in the settling in stage....it would definitely be the best transition we've had out of any of our Year 7 groups. And I think that's because the school was best prepared to support them. And I think the staff were prepared because I was able to prep the staff for the students coming in as well (Interviewee 1).

Interestingly, the increased staff awareness of Indigenous students' individual needs and backgrounds also contributed to improvements in the transition program itself, with staff demonstrating a better understanding of "what to ask and what to look for in their visits" (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

Student and family familiarity and confidence with the school environment

Transition programs directly benefited prospective and future Indigenous students and their family members by increasing their familiarity and confidence with the school environment, and in particular in "forming connections as early as possible" between students, and between students, their families and staff (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Even before encountering the physical school environment for the first time, visits from school staff to students' home communities reduced potential anxieties and fears that students and their carers may have been feeling.

Thank you for taking the time to travel to our home. It is nice to start the relationship in our community, we will be less nervous when we visit [the school] knowing key staff (Parent of Indigenous student, email, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Like all boarding situations, it's a massive responsibility to look after other people's children, but it's kind of magnified in an Indigenous context because their families are tight and their communities are so connected, that it kind of magnifies it....it's great for them to know me and some of the staff that are working with the kids and to have an opportunity to do that....the funding allowed us to take more people and to stay overnight and to visit the primary schools and to do that really important work (Interviewee 2).

The "community engagement and working with our parents and extended family members" resulted in stronger connections from the outset and a "feeling of safety and value coming from parents to openly engage with us during that time" (Interviewee 3).

One project staff person described the impact of having previously visited the students' family in their home environment when it came time for the family to meet the Principal for the student's interview:

And so that was, you know, I've sat in on previous interviews where I hadn't done that [visited the family beforehand]. And I'm meeting [the family] for the first time, Principal's meeting for the first time. And whilst it wasn't uncomfortable, it was a really I suppose their anxieties were higher and having me in the room and a previous relationship, you could see

that they immediately felt they could speak freely, and there was a person in the room they felt safe with. Whilst it was only the beginning of relationship, it definitely made a big difference in that transition to school and the amount of communication I got from those new families after doing that was, I created work for myself! There's no doubt about it because they were really comfortable connecting but it was, that's been really positive (Interviewee 1).

Schools reported that visits to the school for orientation events were critical features of a positive and successful transition experience for Indigenous students and their family members. These formal visits helped students to navigate the school's physical environment and facilities, as well as orientate them to typical school structures and routines. Staff observed high student engagement during tours of school facilities, with students showing "interest on the tour, asking the current Year 7's along the way" (School leader, direct feedback, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Students commented on the importance of getting a feel for the school environment:

I liked how I got to experience a few days at Pymble as it gave me some insight on what to expect at boarding school including the classroom environment, routines, opportunities...by the end of the week I knew the school was for me (Student feedback, Pymble Ladies' College).

The week's trial at Pymble Ladies' College was a great experience it allowed us to get a feel for the school environment, students, boarding house and opportunities the school has on offer (Student feedback, Pymble Ladies' College).

Transition program events and visits provided important opportunities for students and carers to ask questions about academic and cultural support.

[The Transition to Riverview Week] was excellent and we received all the answers to the question we had going into the week (First Nations parent, survey response, provided in project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Questions from students during transition visits included: "Is it hard? How much homework do we get? What if I can't do it? Will the teachers help me?" (Indigenous student, direct conversation, Knox Grammar School). Parents and carers of Indigenous students responded positively to receiving information about cultural support at school and through access to programs such as the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) Culture Club and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) Camps on Country – for example, "that's good...we worry that they go away and they forget their culture" (Parent of Indigenous student, direct feedback, Knox Grammar School).

Some schools reported the importance of encouraging multiple visits to the school prior to commencement. In 2019, the number of visits per Indigenous student and family member to Pymble Ladies' College prior to commencement ranged from one to four, with an average of two visits per student and family member. Following the second visit to the school, one parent shared that she was "excited about [student name] starting next year. I can see all the opportunities that she will have at this school" (Parent of Indigenous student, direct feedback, Pymble Ladies' College). On occasion, the experience of visiting a school could result in a family deciding that "the move to boarding school...would be too great at this point in their lives" (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

College). Multiple visits through transition programs provided Indigenous students and families with genuine opportunities to make informed decisions that they could feel confident about.

Student feelings of connection with peers, safety and belonging in the school and boarding environment

A critical part of a positive and successful transition into the school and boarding environment was the opportunity for students to connect with peers, and for students to feel safe and a sense of belonging in their new school. Several schools reported the formation of new friendships as a positive outcome of providing support for Indigenous students throughout their transition into the school. These friendships emerged from both informal interactions during orientation events and school visits, as well as through formal peer support programs and processes.

Students frequently reported that the highlight of transition events such as orientation days or weeks at their new school was the opportunity to get to know other students, both current and new. Students shared that they “enjoyed visiting the school and meeting other new students” (Indigenous student, email, Kinross Wolaroi School), and the ‘best thing’ about a school visit was meeting a student who they were “excited to see” again (Indigenous student, email, Pymble Ladies’ College). Staff also commented on the connection with peers and formation of friendships during transition programs at school:

At first [student name] was very quiet/shy and did not talk unless I asked him questions...However, he surprised me during the getting to know you game whereby he asked if he could have a turn and be involved (School leader, direct feedback, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

He had a great day at the Orientation Day, and all week. He seemed very comfortable and at-home with his friends in the House Common Room and with the other Year 6s at Orientation (School leader, direct feedback, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Formal peer support programs included ‘buddy’ systems where new Indigenous students were paired with existing and usually older Indigenous students prior to orientation events. Photos of buddies were exchanged prior to meeting, along with background information such as shared interests, favourite subjects, and sports (Project report, Knox Grammar School). The older buddy could be a roommate and guide during transition visits and then subsequently available as a mentor and advisor once school was underway. Parent feedback on this type of peer support was positive, including comments that the older student was “a great buddy and good friend who was funny and kind”, and that it had been a “good choice to link them” with their child (Parent of a new Indigenous student, text message, Knox Grammar School). Schools observed that new friendships formed both through formal and informal means during transition events were often maintained prior to school commencement.

Transition programs continued to support Indigenous students to feel safe and have a sense of belonging in their new community once they had started at school. Specialist staff worked closely with students in school and in the boarding environment to develop their sense of belonging through academic tutoring, cultural activities, extra or co-curricular activities and groups. Eighty per cent (80%, n=8) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students surveyed at Knox Grammar School reported that they felt part of their sports house at the school (Student survey, Knox Grammar

School). Schools reported that these groups provided opportunities for students to support each other socially and emotionally, as well as to ask for advice on how to navigate the day-to-day life of the school (Project report, Barker College). Further evidence of successful student transition was characterised by the willingness of new students to engage and even take a lead in cultural activities at school. The fact that half of the new Indigenous Year 7 students volunteered to deliver the Acknowledgement of Country at their respective House Masses was taken by project staff as “evidence of their confidence and sense of belonging in the College community” (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Staff reflections on students who had successfully transitioned to school commented on these students’ contribution to supporting others. For example, a new Indigenous student at Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview was described as “the ‘rock’ in many cases within the group. He himself battles with homesickness but is instrumental in comforting others when feeling the same.” (First Nations Cultural Mentor, direct feedback, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview). Indigenous students at Knox Grammar School shared some of the things that they found difficult when they first started at Knox, as well as the things that really helped them settle into life at the school. These students most frequently reported “being away from home”, “homesickness”, and “making friends” as aspects of starting at their new school that were difficult (Student survey, Knox Grammar School). While students shared that “fitting in with the different types of people” was difficult, they also commented that “being around people that have been through the same thing”, being able to have “older boys who board talk to you”, and the “support from teachers and peers” were the things that most helped them settle into school life (Student survey, Knox Grammar School).

Satisfaction with support for transition

Schools reported overall satisfaction from students and their family members, as well as from school staff, with the support provided to ensure a positive and successful transition experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into the school and boarding environment. All families indicated that the 2019 Transition to Riverview Week activities/meetings were useful for their son’s transition to Riverview, and that the transition event overall was either ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ (Family survey, St Ignatius’ College, Riverview). Parents of Indigenous students expressed appreciation for the transition support process as a whole, for example:

Thank you for all your support, it has made the transition to boarding school much easier (Parent of an Indigenous student, Kinross Wolaroi School).

I appreciate everything you have done for [us]. I feel much better knowing the people that will be looking after my son next year (Parent of an Indigenous student, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Student surveys from the end of Semester 1 2019 showed that overall, Indigenous students at Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview felt they were supported in their transition to the boarding environment, with 80 per cent (n=8) of Year 7 and Year 8 students agreeing that they felt supported in the Boarding House (Student survey, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Project staff reflected on improvements to transition programs, commenting that changes had resulted in a “more personal, student and family-centred approach”, that established an “appreciation and trust...that [the school] seeks to authentically know, understand and support each student prior to their enrolment” (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Improved strategies

emphasised building “a strong, culturally responsive transition” (Project report, Knox Grammar School) in order to support students and their family members to feel culturally safe, and to lay the foundations for trusting and strong relationships between the school, students, family, and community.

The impact of the changes to improve students’ transition were evident in feedback received in one school from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who had started at the school before the changes were implemented:

So, the First Nations, gentlemen, the older mob, they're really watching us and what's happened in that transition space and they're actually a bit jealous. They're actually coming in and asking why we didn't come and visit *their* families. Why we didn't get to know them as much as we're getting to know these young kids so that's something positive because that's telling me that older boys are seeing us as finally doing something right....gaining that connection to the school before rocking up on the doorstep (Interviewee 4).

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

5.2.1 Strategies and activities to increase Indigenous student aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities

Strategies

Although support for the student experience of transition to life beyond high school was not identified as a high priority at this stage for most schools, a few schools shared important work that they had undertaken in this area as part of Phase 2. These schools described intentions to provide transition-out support to students that increased both the aspirations and expectations that Indigenous students hold for their futures. Strategies for this guidance and support involved increasing student awareness, motivation and confidence towards further education and employment opportunities, and then actively engaging students in planning and decision-making for life after school.

Activities

Work undertaken by network schools to increase Indigenous student aspiration and expectations towards further education and employment could be broadly classified into the following three areas of activity:

- provision of information and advice about further education and employment options and opportunities
- engagement and partnership with further education and employment providers
- implementation of a holistic post-school planning program.

i. Provision of information and support for further education and employment options and opportunities

All project schools who reported activities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their transition to life after high school described extensive provision of information about further education and employment options and opportunities. The importance of this approach is reflected

in research that Indigenous students aspire for further work and study but are less likely than non-Indigenous students to be informed about employment options and opportunities for further education and training post-school¹⁶. Staff connected students with, and facilitated their attendance at, a range of tertiary education and employment opportunity exhibitions and information sessions held in school, as well as at other schools in the local area.

Strong connections were established between Indigenous students and Careers Advisors in order to share information and advice about careers and career pathways, and to encourage students to attend workshops and sessions providing information about Indigenous Tertiary Assistance and available programs. Schools reported the development of new resources such as calendars of events for senior students to make sure they were aware of key dates and deadlines, and a dedicated Indigenous Students Careers webpage with information on traineeships, apprenticeships, scholarships, outreach programs and online applications provided all in one place (Project report, Calrossy Anglican College). Schools described providing support and direct assistance to Indigenous students with further education and scholarship applications. One of the project schools reported offering its first self-funded Indigenous Scholarship for 2020 (Project report, Calrossy Anglican College).

ii. Engagement and partnership with further education and employment providers

Project teams also reported engaging directly with further education and employment providers to ensure that Indigenous students had opportunities to participate in on-campus and on-site outreach experiences. Specific programs highlighted by schools included: UNSW Nura Gili Winter School, University of Sydney Wingara Muru – Bunga Barrabugu Summer Program, and the National Indigenous Australians Agency Work Exposure in Government (WEX) program. Schools also partnered with staff from Indigenous units at universities and TAFE providers in Sydney (UTS Jumbunna), Newcastle, Armidale (UNE Ooralla), and Canberra (UNSW ADFA) to run information sessions on institution-specific Indigenous pathways and programs. The building and maintenance of relationships with a range of tertiary education institutions and prospective student employment partners was described as “a crucial resource” and a “priority of the project” in order to “meet the infinite range of academic and employment interests and aspirations” of a diverse cohort of students (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

iii. Implementation of a holistic post-school planning program

The development and implementation of a holistic program incorporating personalised planning and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to successfully transition to life beyond high school was described by Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill and Kinross Wolaroi School. These programs involved formalised planning processes with Indigenous students in order to develop clear pathways in the following four key areas or ‘pillars’ of support: further education, employment, accommodation, and social network or leisure (Project reports, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill, and Kinross Wolaroi School). The formal process commenced in either Year 11 or 12 with a meeting between each student and the Indigenous Coordinator or Head of Indigenous Education to devise a ‘post-school transition map’ that included plans and actions related to each of the four areas of

¹⁶ Craven, R., Tucker, A., Munns, G., Hinkley, J., Marsh, H. & Simpson, K. (2005). Indigenous students’ aspirations: Dreams, perceptions and realities. *Self-concept Enhancement and Learning Facilitation Research Centre*, University of Western Sydney, <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A4477>

support. The schools assisted students with university or TAFE applications and course enrolments, helped to organise accommodation close to prospective further education institutions, supported students with finding part-time or casual work while they study, and encouraged students to participate in local sports and recreation, and community clubs and organisations.

5.2.2 Evidence of increased Indigenous student aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment opportunities

Student awareness of further education and employment options and opportunities

Activities to increase Indigenous student awareness of further education and employment options and opportunities resulted in student participation in university outreach and employment experience programs at some schools. For example, students have shown increased interest in attending university summer or winter schools, with applications from 75 per cent (n=4) of the Indigenous Year 10 students at Kinross Wolaroi School in 2019 (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School). Students also responded positively to opportunities to explore future careers. In response to a question about why they applied for the National Indigenous Australians Agency Work Exposure in Government (WEX) program, an Indigenous student shared that it was:

because of the opportunity it gives Indigenous kids to find jobs in the government, as a student I want to take opportunities like these to find out the jobs I would like to do after school (Student survey, Calrossy Anglican College).

Schools also reported evidence of learnings about the importance of timing support for Indigenous students early enough to influence decision-making around their choices for further education. Meeting with Year 12 students to discuss university options specific for Indigenous graduates may be too late due to students' "choice of employment prior...as well as previously arranged gap year options" (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School). Early awareness of opportunities for university study through specific entry pathways and financial support was critical to ensure a greater understanding of the range of options and resources available to Indigenous students.

Student aspirations and expectations towards further education and employment options and opportunities

Project schools reported evidence that student participation in further education and employment outreach programs and experiences resulted in increased aspiration and expectations for Indigenous students about their futures. These programs increased motivation and confidence towards further education, supporting students to feel that university is a realistic option for them.

Since attending the Nura Gilli Winter school I feel like I could actually attend university (Direct Indigenous student feedback, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Employment experience programs such as the National Indigenous Australians Agency Work Exposure in Government (WEX) program were also reported to provide inspiration and affirmation about Indigenous students' future career goals.

I knew that this opportunity would help me make a better decision about my career after school as I knew I wanted to go to the police force and being able to go to the ADF was an

amazing experience which really clarified that being in the ADF is really what I wanted to do (Student survey, Calrossy Anglican College).

Positive feedback from students supported schools in “concluding that we will continue to keep endorsing and encouraging our students to apply for the WEX Program, as well as other similar programs in the coming years” (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School). Project schools also observed the potential ripple effect from having previous participants in aspiration-building outreach experiences within the Indigenous student cohort, due to their capacity to “talk to and mentor [younger students] through this process” (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School).

In addition to building aspiration and expectations towards further education and future employment through the experience of participating in targeted outreach programs, schools reported evidence of the positive impact of the academic support they provided to Indigenous students on their hopes for the future. Nearly half of Indigenous students surveyed (46%, n=13) either agreed or strongly agreed that their aspirations/plans and goals for life after school had changed because of the academic support they receive at school (Student survey, combined data from Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill and Kinross Wolaroi School). Students shared that they “never had any goals after school but now I do”, and that they were “unsure of what I wanted to do but now I know I want to be a primary school teacher” (Student survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill). In addition to the academic support, students commented on the impact of the “teaching” and “student culture grown [at school]” on their aspirations for life after school (Student survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

The perspectives of parents of Indigenous students strongly supported evidence from student surveys, with over 80 per cent (81%, n=17) agreeing or strongly agreeing that their son’s aspirations and options for life after school had changed because of academic support provided by the school (Parent survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill). One parent shared their reflection that “it is as though [their son] can see more doors can be opened” (Parent survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

Student destinations and graduate outcomes

The potential destinations of Indigenous students were reported by schools with holistic post-school planning programs. Over 65 per cent (67%, n=6) of graduating Indigenous students had applied to university, with three confirmed offers at the time of reporting (Project reports, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill and Kinross Wolaroi School). In addition, one Indigenous student had a confirmed TAFE place, and another had been accepted into a university enabling program (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill). Most students had also secured part-time employment to support their study (83%, n=5), had accommodation arrangements in place (100%, n=6), and had established connections with community clubs and organisations (67%, n=4; Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill). The outcomes of holistic post-school programs were described as key project achievements and provided a reflection of these schools’ long-term commitment to the wellbeing and success of their Indigenous students.

5.3 Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage (Outcome 4)

5.3.1 Strategies and activities to strengthen connection to and pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage

Strategies

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to develop a sense of identity and pride in their culture and heritage was at the heart of all project schools' strategies to strengthen students' connection to their Indigenous culture. The critical importance of this strategy was identified in Phase 1 of the pilot project and in previous findings regarding the importance to Indigenous students' wellbeing and progress of valuing and supporting Indigenous culture in the school¹⁷. Project teams reported the importance of taking more intentional steps to build this connection to culture for students, for example through opportunities to learn about, experience and display confidence in traditional practices and languages, both within and outside of the school community, and by "introducing really explicit programmes around building wellbeing with cultural sensitivity for the students, and honouring the culture more in a visible way in the school" (Interviewee 5). One project staff person explained that central to their project was "communicating to our students that actually their Aboriginal heritage and culture is important to us. And we respect and acknowledge that...." (Interviewee 6). Schools recognised that by offering more opportunities for Indigenous students to develop and demonstrate pride in their cultural identity, the whole community benefits through learning, respect, and more authentic relationships with each other and with the environment.

Activities

Activities undertaken by network schools to strengthen connection to and pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage included:

- provision of culturally safe spaces and groups within school
- cultural learning, coaching and mentoring opportunities within school
- cultural learning experiences and excursions outside of school
- Indigenous student involvement and leadership in school-wide events.

i. Culturally safe spaces and groups

Most of the schools reporting progress in strengthening connection to culture and heritage provided students with culturally safe places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to meet and talk. Yarning circles and yarning programs or groups were common initiatives, described as either a

¹⁷ Mooney, J., Seaton, M., Kaur, G., & Seeshing Yeung, A. (2016). Cultural perspectives on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students' school motivation and engagement, and reciprocal research partnership model. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 47, 11-23, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2016.04.006>; Sarra, C. (2003). Young and Black and Deadly: Strategies for Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students. *Paper No.5 Quality Teaching Series*, ACT: Australian College of Educators. Lewthwaite, B. E., Boon, H., Webber, T., & Laffin, G. (2017). Quality Teaching Practices as Reported by Aboriginal Parents, Students and their Teachers: Comparisons and Contrasts. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(12), 80-97, <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss12/5>

specific culturally inclusive physical space for meeting and talking, or as the regular coming together of a group of Indigenous students to sit together and have an informal yarn. Groups such as the 'Koori Club' at Shore, and the 'Yarn Up' program at Barker College held fortnightly or weekly meetings over lunch. These groups were intended for creating connections and sharing of experiences amongst existing Indigenous students, and in one instance to encourage future students to feel welcome and part of the school community prior to transitioning to Year 7 (Project report, Barker College).

ii. Cultural learning, coaching, and mentoring within school

Cultural mentors provided and organised cultural activities on a group basis within school, connecting students to members of the local community, fostering relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and providing individual mentoring and pastoral care.

Project teams described several opportunities for students to engage in cultural learning within school. Native gardens and traditional bush tucker food were planted at several schools. Other in-school cultural learning activities included opportunities to share knowledge and celebrate culture within House groups, listening to external guest speakers and community members with Aboriginal perspectives, Aboriginal dance activities, participating in Indigenous Visual Arts projects and language training. Aboriginal language programs and units were introduced at a number of schools - for example, Wiradjuri language programs at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Canberra Grammar School (see 7.3). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Kempsey Adventist College were consulted on what aspects of their culture they would like to learn about. A number of key themes emerged from student focus groups, including student responses that they would like to "learn about Aboriginal sport", "learn Dunghutti language", and "participate in activities such as inviting Aboriginal Elders into school to read to students" (Student focus groups, Kempsey Adventist College).

One school acknowledged the challenge of carving time out for students from already full days to focus on their Indigenous heritage, explaining that:

X have such a great programme, they do their academics well and their co-curricular and have lots of after-hours activities, and the boys are just going going going. But I think they really don't have time to think about who they are, and you know, they're just busy doing Xs things (Interviewee 3).

The school is working with Indigenous students' parents to be guided by them in supporting building their children's cultural identity.

iii. Cultural learning experiences and excursions outside of school

Cultural excursions and learning opportunities were also available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students outside of school. Schools facilitated weekly or fortnightly Indigenous student attendance at community groups that provided culturally informed activities, such as the NSW Health's Aboriginal Youth Program at Waitara PCYC and the Dubay group in Casino. On Country excursions and cultural camps such as Art on Country at the Brewongle Environmental Education Centre in the Blue Mountains, encouraged students to learn traditional skills such as creating natural paint, building a fire, finding bush tucker and using medicinal herbs for health (Project report, Shore). Cultural exchange programs offered by schools also provided students with intensive cultural

immersion and learnings, and work was underway to create a Junior Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) at a few schools.

iv. Indigenous student involvement and leadership in school-wide events

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in school-wide events was reported by all project schools. School-wide cultural events were described as important ways for schools to acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous culture (see also 7.3). Events such as the NAIDOC week assembly, Reconciliation Week activities, Annual Sorry Day Walk, and Indigenous Sporting Rounds were prominent features on the school calendar and are explored in more detail in section 7.3 of this report. This section focuses on opportunities reported by project schools for Indigenous students to take a leadership role in these events and other school assemblies and gatherings through the practice of Acknowledgement of Country, and by sharing their culture with their peers and wider school community through personal and cultural contributions to school life.

5.3.2 Evidence of students' strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage

Indigenous student awareness and acknowledgement of their culture and heritage

Cultural learning, coaching and mentoring opportunities within schools resulted in increased awareness of and knowledge about Indigenous culture and heritage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Some of the cultural coaching offered by schools had a focus on general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and traditional culture. The role of a cultural coach at Shore, for example, included:

- providing general and specialised education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander belief systems, nations, and traditions
- encouraging students to be proactive in their own learning and to promote continual cultural understanding and development individually and throughout the community (Project report, Shore).

A cultural mentoring program developed by local elders and AECG members for Indigenous students at Knox Grammar School “supports their cultural backgrounds and provides real opportunities to help these young men to explore and be grounded in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The program aims to have a cultural component each week where these young men learn more about their culture and individual histories” (Unshakeable program description, provided by Knox Grammar School). These activities and the ongoing support provided by the school’s Cultural Mentor have “fostered increased resilience and social and emotional wellbeing”, with some boys moving from reluctance to demonstrate culture because of a fear of not knowing, to a place of strength, for example “enthusiastically and proudly” participating in a filmed Acknowledgement of Country (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

Learning opportunities outside of school also increased cultural awareness and knowledge. Indigenous students expressed their desire to participate in these experiences with the goal of learning more about Indigenous culture and heritage. For example, an Indigenous student applying to participate in a Year 8 cultural exchange wrote: “If I go to Worawa School I would be able to extend my knowledge of culture and my people” (Student application, Pymble Ladies’ College).

Many project schools reported evidence of increased Indigenous contribution, leadership, and voice in school-wide events, resulting in increased cultural awareness for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and the wider school community (see also 7.3). Project teams reported Indigenous students regularly helping to plan and celebrate, and often lead, speak, and perform at school assemblies.

The current students initiated a regular opportunity to acknowledge country at every assembly, when it was previous custom to only offer this at the start of each term. Students have really embraced this and want to share the roster amongst themselves (Project report, Canberra Grammar School).

A project staff person explained that she had seen:

....an increase within our Indigenous students of pride and willingness to share their culture....I've just come from a meeting planning NAIDOC celebrations and there's just so many students who are willing to do acknowledgments and willing to share their stories, to sing, dance, do all these different things.... the students are driving it, I guess cultural confidence and their pride, that's really what we're seeing.... it's very driven by the students (Interviewee 7).

The project was seen to be playing a key part in empowering Indigenous students to feel confident in their culture and in sharing that culture across the school. One project staff person described the willingness of Indigenous students to lead Sorry Day assemblies and this was because:

....we're certainly empowering those young boys through Year 7 to 10 that sense of belonging here, you are a part of the community, you're a strong part, you're an essential part of the community now (Interviewee 8).

One school described that through their support for students' increased pride in culture they aim to challenge racist attitudes and give students the tools to combat these attitudes not only at school but onwards into their future lives in society:

I think we've got to give them the tools too and I think that's what we're doing, to be proud of who they are, and not to expect or accept racist comments. And I think that's what we're seeing at X, that they're so proud of who they are....It's, it's part of what X is, they've got to leave us with that confidence about who they are, where they've come from. Be proud of it and share it and talk about it and not shy away from it. And I think that's what we're enabling the boys to do here (Interviewee 9).

In addition to increased awareness of their Indigenous culture generally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gained and demonstrated increased awareness of their personal and family heritage. Schools reported increased Indigenous student interest in delivering Acknowledgement of Country in their own traditional languages and preparing for this by either speaking with family members or Elders and carrying out independent research to locate information from other sources. Teachers worked with students to help them identify their Country, particularly in schools where most students are off Country and may not have known much about their cultural identity and heritage in the past. Cultural programs offered within schools helped students to become more aware of their personal Indigenous heritage, as well as that of their peers. For example, 'Yarn Up' students at Barker College identified their own Nations and those of their peers on an AIATSIS map hanging in their lounge (Figure 18).

[Student name] could not identify which Nation he was from at the start of this year, but after listening to the other students in ‘Yarn Up’ talk about their Country and cultures, and wanting to add his photo to the map, he encouraged his parents to find out and proudly announced during Term 3 that he is Yuin (Indigenous Education Projects Leader report, Barker College).



Figure 18. AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia for ‘Yarn Up’ participants, Barker College

Indigenous student connection to culture, community, and Country

Throughout Phase 2 of the project, project schools increased both the frequency and authenticity of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to connect with their culture, community, and Country. “Students are increasingly asking/making requests to participate in activities relating to Indigenous culture” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College). Survey results from one school suggested that a considerable proportion of parents and students were unconvinced that the school was providing sufficient opportunities to engage with Indigenous culture (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). This remains a complex issue for schools whose Indigenous students may be from, or identify with, diverse nations and traditions.

Outside the school environment, schools worked towards facilitating experiences that extended beyond awareness raising and provided Indigenous students with opportunities to fully engage in traditional practices.

For example, the *Art on Country* excursion involved Indigenous students from Shore visiting Dharug country, and learning about medicinal flora, fauna, hunting tools, building fire, making ochre plants and finding local bush tucker (Figure 19). Feedback from “families, housemasters and teachers reported that the boys spoke highly of this day” and have since made several requests to return (Project report, Shore).



Figure 19. *Art on Country* excursion, Shore

Plans were in place for future excursions with new Year 7 Indigenous students, and for the Year 8 to 12 Indigenous boys to invite a non-Indigenous friend to accompany them when they return so they can teach their friends these traditional skills and practices (Project report, Shore).

There is also evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have experienced a greater sense of connection to their culture through opportunities to connect with Indigenous community outside of school. Students from project schools who participated in the NSW Health's Aboriginal Youth Program at Waitara PCYC (n=21) engaged with community both within and outside of their school group while taking part in culturally informed and empowered activities facilitated by Indigenous leaders. Ninety-two percent of students surveyed about their experience of the program felt they "belonged to the group", and 84 per cent of students reported that the program helped them to feel "connected to their culture" (Sydney North Health Network Report on Outcomes for PCYC Indigenous Youth Program, referred to in Knox Grammar School, Barker College and Pymble Ladies' College project reports).

Within the school environment, connection to Indigenous culture was strengthened for students through language learning, planting, and tending of native gardens, and artistic expression through Visual Arts projects. Wiradjuri language lessons offered at Canberra Grammar School "have helped with students connecting to culture" and the "Native Garden Project has been a great success as far as sharing and growing culture" (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). Indigenous students were encouraged to explore and connect with their culture, community, and Country, as well as spirituality and ancestors through the creation of major artworks. The artwork shown in Figure 20 was accompanied by an artist statement explaining the cultural references and connections portrayed in the work. These included the Aboriginal cultures of Mainland Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, the local community and environment around the Hornsby Plateau where the school is located, as well as the students, staff, parents, and school alumni. The student's story about the artwork expressed how people from many cultures and backgrounds come together to form a community and learn about each other (Year 11 student artist statement, Barker College). The student's artwork shown in Figure 21 was also strongly influenced by personal Indigenous culture and heritage, telling the story of three generations of her family represented by a shield, a basket and a sun (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).



Figure 20. Indigenous student artwork, Barker College



Figure 21. Indigenous student artwork, Pymble Ladies' College

Cultural safety at school for Indigenous students

Project teams reported evidence that Indigenous students feel culturally safe at school through their use of designated culturally sensitive physical spaces, as well as their willingness to express their Indigenous culture through participation in cultural activities both within and outside of school. Designated spaces were established for outdoor yarning circles (Figures 22 and 23), and in one instance “planted out with bush tucker food” (Project report, Casino Christian School). Indoor rooms or offices were furnished with lounges, chairs, and amenities such as tea and coffee making facilities to help students and family/community feel welcome and safe. Indoor spaces were also decorated with artwork from students, and from communities that Indigenous students and schools have relationships with.



Figure 22. Yarning circle, Casino High School



Figure 23. Yarning circle, Shore

School reports suggested that the use of these spaces increased throughout Phase 2 of the project and that they were contributing to students’ feelings of cultural safety.

Yarning circles had previously not been used. Now evidence of increased cultural safety is reflected in their regular use – for ‘Koori Club’, Cultural Coaching and family and community meetings (Project report, Shore).

There was evidence from schools that Indigenous students were increasingly willing to express their culture through participation in cultural activities.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students identify and participate in at least one cultural activity offered by the school. Students have also initiated activities, including requesting to form an Indigenous Dance Troupe (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).

Student X reported that the shifting atmosphere of the school to a more diverse and inclusive place has helped him remain connected to culture, and identified ‘Yarn Up’ as an example of this changing school culture, stating “I remember when I first came there was none of this stuff and to see it all changing into a new kinda social accepting culture together, which I can only hope after I graduate that it keeps getting better, you know what I mean, like for the other Indigenous students, and the younger ones” (Student interview provided in project report, Barker College).

Survey results from one school showed that 80 per cent (n=18) of Indigenous students and over 90 per cent (n=19) of their parents agreed or strongly agreed that they or their child felt “confident and comfortable celebrating and sharing their identity and culture” in the school community (Parent survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

Indigenous student pride in and valuing of their culture and heritage

School staff and family member reflections on Indigenous student engagement in cultural activities within the school environment were often characterised by observations of students’ pride in their culture and heritage. Student initiation of cultural activities such as dance groups was seen to highlight their “increasing pride in their heritage and boldness to display their heritage in a very public manner” (Project report, Casino Christian School). School staff reported that students were proud to “share their story” and knowledge of their own Indigenous culture, and “be seen to be educating our community” (Project reports, Barker College and Canberra Grammar School). Schools observed that the increased confidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were demonstrating in their awareness and knowledge of their own culture resulted in increased ownership in cultural practices and celebrations such as ‘Acknowledgement of Country’, and increased pride in their identity. One staff member remarked:

[Student name]’s Acknowledgement at the Whole of Boarding meeting was so moving – his pride in his culture and what Knox means to him showed so naturally (Staff comment, REACH school boarding system, Knox Grammar School).

Parents of Indigenous students also reported an increase in their child’s pride in their culture and heritage. For example:

[Student name] is extremely proud to be contributing to the acknowledgement and has been researching ways of making this important moment in time reflective of her maturing sense of self and a recognition of her community...Once again thank you for supporting [student name]’s continuing confidence as a young lady and Indigenous leader (Parents of Indigenous student, email, Barker College).

Students demonstrated the pride they have in their Indigenous culture through their willingness to take a leadership role in representing their communities, and “teach their peers about Aboriginal culture and histories through telling personal stories to highlight their experience” (Project report, Knox Grammar School). A student’s comment on taking a personalised approach to an Acknowledgement of Country at a whole-school assembly demonstrated his pride in his Indigenous culture and community:

I changed the Acknowledgement – I wanted to talk about my people too and be proud and I want to share it (Indigenous student, personal communication, Knox Grammar School).

When sharing their Indigenous culture and heritage with their peers and school communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students articulated their pride in jointly representing their Indigenous communities, their school communities, and their families.

I know my tribe but as well as that I have a big family and I am proud to identify as Aboriginal and share things and answer questions on my culture (Student survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

I'm a proud descendant of the Wiradjuri nation in NSW. Today we stand here as both proud Aboriginal Women and proud Loreto Women... I will be the first person in my family to graduate Year 12 and go to university. The significance of this goes beyond my individual self, as it is said, when an Aboriginal person is educated they not only heal 10 generations back, but also save 10 generations going forward (Indigenous student, Acknowledgement of Country transcript, Loreto Normanhurst).

Evidence from project schools suggests that increased opportunity and support for Indigenous students to initiate and take the lead in representing their families, communities and Nations within the school and wider community resulted in greater personal pride in and valuing of their Indigenous culture and heritage.

5.4 Indigenous students have improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing (Outcome 5)

5.4.1 Strategies and activities to improve the social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of Indigenous students

Strategies

Project schools' efforts to improve the social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were driven by the needs of the Indigenous students in their care and were deeply connected to progressing several key outcomes across the Waratah Outcomes Framework. Strategies to improve Indigenous student wellbeing were closely aligned with strategies to strengthen student connection and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage (section 5.3), create a sense of belonging for Indigenous students through positive transition into the school environment (section 5.1), build strengthened and culturally informed relationships with staff and students (section 6.1), and improve staff capacity and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogies (section 7.1).

The alignment of multiple outcomes with Indigenous student wellbeing reflects the complex and multifactorial nature of social, emotional and physical health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The holistic model of Indigenous wellbeing in the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023¹⁸ emphasises connection across a number of domains of wellbeing, including body, mind and emotions, family and kinship, community, culture, country, and spirituality and ancestors (Figure 24)¹⁹. Project schools have implemented strategies directed at multiple domains featured in this model of social and emotional wellbeing, with a particular focus on connection to culture.

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023, https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/mhsewb-framework_0.pdf

¹⁹ Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A., & Kelly, K. (2014). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing. In P. Dudgeon, H. Milroy, & R. Walker (Eds.), *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice* (2nd ed., pp. 55-58). Commonwealth Government of Australia. <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/wt-part-1-chapt-4-final.pdf>

Figure 24. Model of Indigenous Wellbeing (Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, and Kelly, 2014)



Activities

Activities undertaken by project schools to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students included:

- programs and initiatives to strengthen connection to and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage (section 5.3.1)
- professional learning opportunities for staff to develop cultural competency, particularly in relation to trauma-informed practice (section 7.1.1)
- cross-school collaborative responsibility for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (section 7.1.1)
- targeted health and wellbeing support for individual students.

Targeted support for Indigenous student health and wellbeing was determined by individual student needs and included appointments with school-based and external health professionals such as counsellors, child psychologists, dentists, optometrists, dieticians, and paediatricians. Culturally appropriate health and wellbeing support was also provided for some students through the Bungee Bidgel Aboriginal Health Clinics in Hornsby (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Some schools developed or are planning specific courses for all or some staff to support Indigenous student wellbeing, such as a two-day Aboriginal Adolescent Mental Health First Aid course.

5.4.2 Evidence of improved social, emotional, and physical wellbeing in Indigenous students

Direct evidence of improved wellbeing in Indigenous students is limited at this stage of the project. Schools would likely benefit from support to implement direct measures of wellbeing in future, such as a culturally appropriate wellbeing index or scale. Project schools did report positive indications of strengthening connection to culture for Indigenous students, as described above in section 5.3.2. Given the critical relationship between connection to culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander People²⁰, this is important progress towards improved wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous students. Many project schools emphasised their commitment to supporting Indigenous students to build a healthy and strong relationship to their Indigenous heritage, characterised by a sense of security and pride in their Indigenous identity.

Project schools also reported evidence that Indigenous students and their parents or carers were satisfied with the support for student wellbeing provided by the school. Trust in school and Indigenous program staff to care for the wellbeing of Indigenous students was evident through the willingness of family members to communicate with staff about their children's day-to-day personal health and welfare. Targeted interventions for individual students in areas of health and wellbeing were discussed and agreed with students, family members and health specialists, leading to improvements in diet and dental care, provision of corrective eyewear, and psychological support and counselling (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Staff were instrumental in ensuring that students attended required appointments with health specialists, and parents felt comfortable to reach out to staff to ask for help with personal issues such as replacing worn socks and shoes or other uniform items (SMS communication between parents and the First Nations Education Coordinator, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Results from surveys conducted at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill showed strong agreement (95%, n=20) from Indigenous students and their parents that staff genuinely care about student happiness and wellbeing. Similar levels of agreement emerged from family survey results at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Kinross Wolaroi School, with 91 per cent (n=10) and 89 per cent (n=8) of parents surveyed agreeing or strongly agreeing that the staff of the Indigenous Program truly care about the happiness and wellbeing of their child. Aggregate results from these surveys are shown in Figure 25.

Parents or carers of Indigenous students emphasised the importance of project and Indigenous Program staff in supporting their child's wellbeing.

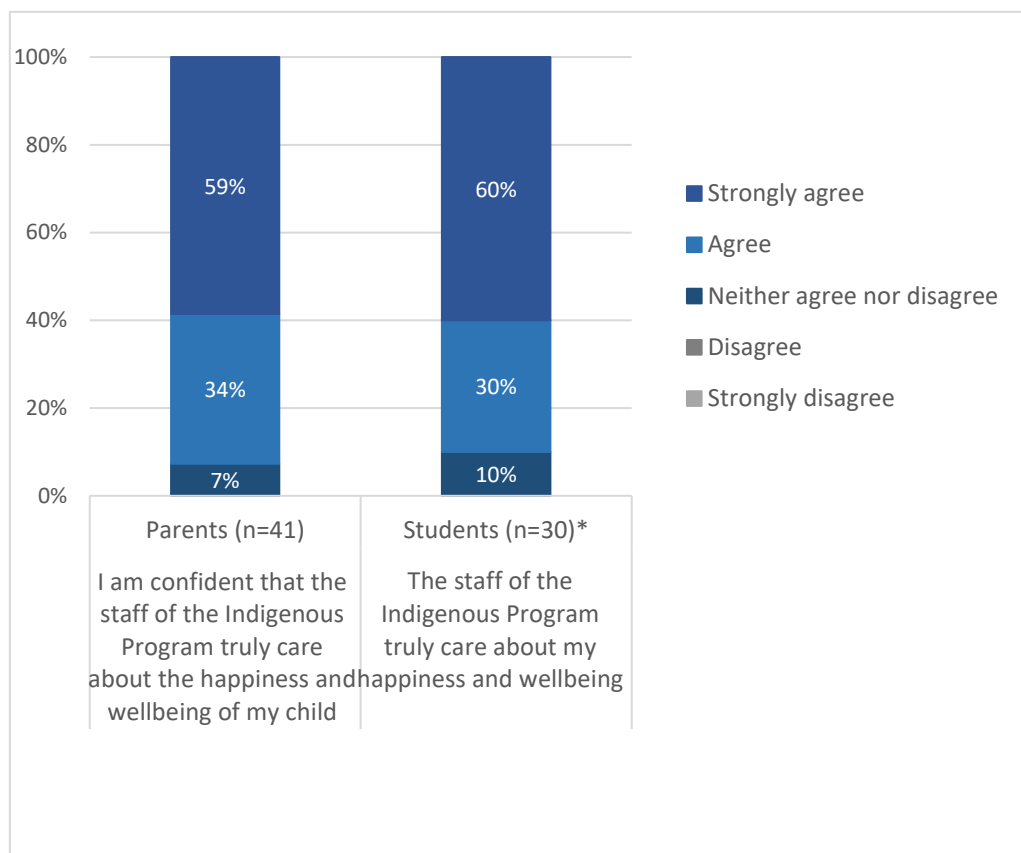
I absolutely believe my son is cared for and feels cared for and supported by the Indigenous team (Parent survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

I believe the team wouldn't be in the role if they didn't truly care about my son or his happiness. The support my son received, is why he is happy (Parent survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Indigenous students also shared their feelings about Indigenous Program staff support, commenting that "if I am sad or something they deal with it straight away", and "they always help and make sure I am okay" (Student survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill). There was strong recognition amongst project schools of the importance of their role in providing holistic support across the entire student educational journey in order to improve academic, cultural, and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

²⁰ Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A., and Kelly, K., 2014. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing. *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, 2, 55-68.

Figure 25. Parent and student opinion on staff care for Indigenous student wellbeing, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Kinross Wolaroi School aggregate data



*Student data available from Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, and Kinross Wolaroi School only

6. Progress towards strengthened and culturally informed relationships

Working towards strengthened and culturally informed relationships was a priority area for most schools in Phase 2 of the project. This report focuses on progress made by schools to strengthen and culturally inform relationships between school, family, and community (Outcome 6), as well as between staff and students (Outcome 7). Nearly 70 per cent (69%, n=9) of schools reported progress in relationships between school, family, and community, and 25 per cent (n=4) reported progress specific to relationships between staff and students. There were many emerging connections between the efforts made by schools to build relationships between school, family and community and work undertaken by schools to deepen trust and cultural understanding between staff and students. Evidence of progress towards both outcomes is woven together throughout this section of the report.

6.1 Relationships between school, students, family, and community are strengthened and culturally informed (Outcomes 6 and 7)

6.1.1 Strategies and activities to build strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, students, family, and community

Strategies

Project schools focused on building strong, culturally responsive relationships between staff and students, and with Indigenous students' families and communities. Schools with experience in this area through participation in Phase 1 emphasised the importance of building and strengthening relationships with family and community as a "foundational priority and objective of this project":

It is viewed as equally, if not more important, for staff at the College to build and maintain healthy and positive relationships with the students' family as it is with the students. These relationships form the foundation for the Indigenous Program at our school and the other strategies and activities cannot be implemented until this has been achieved (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Schools learned through experience that these relationships are "crucial in supporting each student academically, emotionally and culturally" throughout their educational journey (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). Strategies in building these critical relationships included commitment from schools to engage with family and community more consistently in a range of aspects of school life across the school year, both within and outside of the school environment.

Activities

Activities undertaken by project schools to build strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, students, family, and community, included:

- professional learning opportunities for staff to develop awareness of cultural elements within relationships (see also 7.1.1)
- fostering strong relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (see also 5.1 and 5.3)
- communicating with and involving family in student learning (see also 4.1.1)
- engaging family and community within the school environment (see also 5.1)
- engaging family and community outside of the school environment (see also 5.1).

i. Professional learning opportunities for staff to develop awareness of cultural elements within relationships

Several schools described providing professional learning opportunities for staff that were specifically intended to enhance awareness of cultural elements within relationships. Programs included externally provided professional development in Indigenous pedagogies such as the *Stronger Smarter* approach and 8 *Aboriginal Ways of Learning*, professional learning with emphasis on trauma informed practice (*Berry Street Educational Model* and *AISNSW Understanding the Ongoing Impact of Trauma in Aboriginal Communities*), general cultural awareness training, and learning opportunities specific to local Indigenous cultures and histories such as the *AECG Connecting to Country* program. Within schools, knowledge and experience acquired through family and community engagement was also shared by Indigenous Education and Support staff to help guide classroom and boarding house practices. Indigenous Education staff provided workshops on Indigenous culture and history and were available for teachers to consult with for advice on engaging with Indigenous students in a culturally appropriate manner.

Further details of project schools' engagement with professional learning and development programs and opportunities are provided in section 7.1.1 of this report.

ii. Fostering strong relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Many schools focused through the project on fostering relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to strengthen a sense of belonging and collective identity. Activities to support peer-to-peer relationship building were described earlier in relation to Outcome 2 (5.1 *Strategies and activities promoting a positive and successful transition experience for Indigenous students into the school and boarding environment*) and Outcome 4 (5.3 *Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage*). Activities included fostering relationships through orientation and transition activities, bringing students together at school in designated culturally sensitive physical spaces, and bringing students together to participate in both academic and cultural activities within and outside of school (see 5.3.2). Schools also sought to provide their students with opportunities to develop wider peer networks through participation in extracurricular cultural and sporting activities with students from other schools, including PCYC, AIME, AIEF and GO activities.

iii. Communicating with and involving family in student learning

All network schools expressed awareness of the importance of effective communication with families of Indigenous students as a critical building block to strengthening relationships. For many schools, activities in this area were designated as part of a specific role within an Indigenous or First Nation Engagement and Support Team. For example, new appointments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Engagement or Liaison Officers were specifically intended to enhance the quality and frequency of communication with families and establish genuine collaboration with and engagement of family in students' school life. One Indigenous project staff person explained that:

When I arrived, the program was more of a more of a showpiece. And really, the parents weren't having a sense of connection at all. And my interpretation of that was that the parents' voice was actually missing for a very long time. So when I first arrived we had our first parent gathering, where the parents actually provided their feedback around what they saw as the future for their boys, how they'd like to be involved, what they'd like to see the boys involved in. So they had really high expectations....I think from my perspective, it's

really coming from the point of, of knowing what the parents want and what the boys want. And working from that centre point and then working outwards (Interviewee 3).

The nature of the communication was varied in scope and type, from regular phone calls, emails and text messages to update parents on student progress, to the development and distribution of a quarterly newsletter outlining activities and achievements throughout the school's Indigenous program (for example, the 'Message Stick' at The Scots College).

A focus of communication with parents for some schools was consultation around student background and heritage, goals and learning needs to enable development of meaningful personalised learning plans for students (PLPs). Parents were invited to be part of this process, either through invitation to the school for discussion or opportunities to review and comment on draft plans prior to approval. Some schools demonstrated an increased focus upon the use of PLPs to engage parents in their children's learning, for example through more clearly articulating to new parents the PLP process and scheduling in advance points of communication and collaboration with parents throughout the year (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

iv. Engaging family and community within the school environment

Project teams reported efforts to enhance family and community engagement in established school events, as well as planning and implementing novel opportunities and occasions for families and community members to connect with the school and student life. Families and community members were invited and encouraged to attend traditional welcome and orientation events, NAIDOC week events, school assemblies and presentation nights, Indigenous Education dinners and breakfasts, and school sporting occasions. Efforts to deepen relationships led to the development of innovative extensions and additions to many of these events – for example, Koori Culture Day held after NAIDOC week, an Indigenous parents' dinner held during Orientation week, termly Family Gatherings and Barbeques, Family Weekends and Fun Days, and Parent-Teacher Interviews. An inaugural Family Weekend for families of all Indigenous students was held at Shore in September 2019. Families from non-Sydney based students were invited to visit the school for a weekend event that included a Family Fun Day for students and their families at Taronga Zoo, followed by a community barbeque where families were able to meet stakeholders from across the school community who have a role in supporting their children (Project report, Shore). Participation in Phase 2 of this AISNSW project enabled schools to support families to attend events such as these hosted by the school, by assisting with travel and accommodation arrangements and costs.

In Term 3, families of Indigenous students were invited to participate in an Indigenous Parent Workshop at The Scots College. This 'Voice, Vision and Connection' workshop brought together almost every Indigenous parent group and their extended family members for the first time. The workshop allowed parents to voice their aspirations for their children and share ideas for the future of the Indigenous Program.

v. Engaging family and community outside of the school environment

Several of the project teams reporting on work undertaken to strengthen school, family and community relationships described efforts to visit the home communities of prospective, current and past students (Project reports, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, Calrossy Anglican College, The Scots College, and Knox Grammar School). Often to rural and regional areas, these visits were usually conducted by Indigenous Program and support staff. Visits provided opportunities to meet and consult with students' local primary and high schools, and

other community support networks such as local legal aid, sports organisations, and wellbeing programs. Most importantly, staff met and shared a meal with students' families, listened to their hopes and concerns for their children and addressed any questions or concerns.

Other schools reported their efforts to reach out to local Indigenous communities and organisations - for example, through engagement with and/or staff representation at local AECG meetings (Project reports, Kempsey Adventist College, Calrossy Anglican College, Casino Christian School, Taree Christian College, and Knox Grammar School). Engagement with local AECG members led to community visits to school, new connections with local Indigenous elders, and the development of a positive behaviour program for Indigenous students. Schools also reported establishing relationships with other community groups and organisations, such as local Indigenous Councils, public schools, and Opportunity Hubs. To develop closer connections for the school and students with its local area, Canberra Grammar School intentionally arranged whole-school projects and excursions to incorporate South Coast communities (Project report, Canberra Grammar School).

6.1.2 Evidence of strengthened and culturally informed relationships between school, students, family, and community

Awareness of cultural elements within relationships

Project schools have learned about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perceive and respond to staff awareness of and respect for their culture, and how this awareness impacts relationships with Indigenous students, families, and communities. In student focus groups at Kempsey Adventist College, Indigenous students were asked to reflect on what their teachers do to show they understand or want to learn more about their culture. Comments from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students highlighted the fact they feel that their teachers care about their culture and that respect is being shown towards their culture more than in the past (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College). One student shared:

When we were learning about how Captain Cook took over Australia my teacher asked me if I was ok, the teacher showed they cared [about my culture] (Stage 4-5 Indigenous student, focus group, Kempsey Adventist College).

Indigenous students who participated in baseline interviews at Loreto Normanhurst revealed they would like teachers to know more about their background and identity, and that teachers might benefit from support to enhance their cultural knowledge and confidence.

I work best when teachers know me and get me (Stage 5 Indigenous student, interview, Loreto Normanhurst).

Staff want to do the right thing, but they seem scared – they stumble over the terminology a lot and seem nervous (Stage 6 Indigenous student, interview, Loreto Normanhurst).

Several project schools reported the direct benefits of professional learning on staff relationships with Indigenous students. Evidence suggests that professional learning opportunities that increase awareness of personal cultural assumptions and the impact of these on relationships may be particularly powerful in supporting staff to develop strengthened and culturally informed relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Through a very targeted and deliberate technique the [*Stronger Smarter*] program provided tools that allowed us to consider and challenge our assumptions in regards to expectations

of our Aboriginal students. The program has provoked a reflection on our management of students' issues and has better equipped us in actively engaging in conversations that promote 'high expectation relationships' (Director of Pastoral Care, Loreto Normanhurst).

Schools that embedded approaches developed through the *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program* reported a positive emphasis on "setting high expectations for Indigenous students" (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School) and supporting staff to develop "cultural competence within a High Expectations Relationships framework" (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

All staff employed at Kempsey Adventist School, regardless of their role at the school, were involved in trauma-aware positive education training on the *Berry Street Education Model*, with the purpose of developing a "common understanding and approach to how we connect with young people" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

A number of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma in their lives therefore the *Berry Street Education Model* was helpful in providing teaching staff with strategies that would assist them in developing and strengthening relationships with students (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

Staff reported strengthened relationships with students as a consequence of the ways in which their practices had shifted through the professional development they had undertaken:

I think the relationships are getting stronger. Like, we did a focus group with our some of our Aboriginal students last week and they seemed a lot more relaxed and comfortable to talk to us. Even a year or two ago, they didn't respond like that. So yeah, I think that's improving all the time. ... just that combination of all of the strategies that we're using, all the training we've had - *Berry Street*, *Stronger*, *Smarter* - and just consistently over a period of time using those strategies, project based learning, all of that's contributing to improving relationships and improving trust as well (Interviewee 10).

Examples of strategies that were being implemented as a consequence of the training included check-ins, ready to learn scale, brain breaks and de-escalation strategies (Project report, Kemspey Adventist School). Increased awareness and acknowledgement of the "broader life experience of our Indigenous students (especially an understanding of the impact of trauma)" was reported as critical to "underpinning all our relationships between staff and students" and "building high expectations relationships at all levels" (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

Indigenous Program and support staff who had already participated in professional learning reported strategies to ensure that their increased knowledge and skills supported improved relationships between staff and Indigenous students and their families – for example, providing advocacy for Indigenous students in liaising with their teachers and boarding staff, and advising teaching staff on culturally appropriate practices informed by deep engagement with Indigenous students' families and communities.

The role of professional learning and development on staff capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices will be explored in section 7.1.2 of this report.

Strengthened relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander students

Activities to develop strengthened and culturally based relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students resulted in increased cultural identity, confidence, and pride in culture:

By far the most important element has been bringing the boys together as a group. Up until the project, they were sort of little isolated lighthouses dotted around the school but by bringing them together, and we did that because of being part of the project, [we created] that sense of belonging, those interactions that are super valuable....It's really given them a sense of identity within the school and now we're seeing pride as a result of that....their enthusiasm you know, a couple of the boys are really quite young boys and they would never put themselves out there and very few people would know that they are actually of Aboriginal descent. But they're very prepared to stand up there now and say, 'yes, this is me. And this is my family's history and I really want you to know more about my identity'. And that's huge (Interviewee 11).

One school noted that “all students when asked about what helped their transition into the school environment mentioned the support and sometimes even just existence of other Indigenous students at the school” (Project report, Barker College). Cross-school activities were reported as contributing to students developing ‘more confidence in and engagement with their identity and culture’ (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).

Strengthened communication between schools and families

Project schools recognised that open and effective communication with Indigenous students and their families was critical from enrolment and throughout each student’s journey through school and beyond graduation. Project teams provided feedback on improved relationships with parents following sustained efforts to increase the level of communication from the school, mostly in the form of regular phone calls, emails and SMS messages providing updates on student welfare and progress, as well as school activities and events. Many parents responded to improved levels of school communication, for example 70 per cent of parents of Indigenous students thanked the school for “regular and thoughtful updates provided” (Project report, Shore). Parents were “responding quickly to emails and texts, rather than having to chase up” and were initiating phone calls “which is very helpful in keeping staff members up to date with family events and concerns” (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School). Frequent communication from the First Nations Education Coordinator and Cultural Mentor to parents of Indigenous students at Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview, included SMS updates featuring audio recordings to demonstrate improvements in their child’s reading fluency. Parents responded and expressed their appreciation for these updates:

That’s so good my boy makes me so proud thank you so much (Parent communication, SMS, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Schools also observed changes in parent engagement as improved communication led to strengthened relationships. After numerous phone calls over a six-month period, a staff member reported that the parent of an Indigenous student “felt welcome to come into the classroom after school to have a yarn” (Project report, Taree Christian College). A project staff person explained the benefits of visiting students in their home environment, including developing a deeper rapport with and understanding of the student and building parent’s confidence and comfort in contacting the school:

....it's very easy for her [student's mother] to ring any member of the school because she feels that people know her situation and X's situation quite clearly. Whereas before we didn't even have a list of who were our Indigenous students, who was on Abstudy or any of those sort of connections weren't made....I think we're a lot more involved with them not just at school but with the connections to family and with connections to community....I get parents ringing me, like X's mum this morning so when I go and see X he doesn't have to put up a wall, I can say 'I spoke to mum she told me', so I don't have to try and break it down (Interviewee 12).

Other stakeholders expressed satisfaction with increased communication from schools throughout the project. A community Elder commented on the "positive change in Shore's approach" (Project report, Shore), and a program sponsor responded enthusiastically to the introduction of a quarterly newsletter:

Great initiative with the Message Stick...It is just the sort of newsletter we were talking about when we met to keep those involved with the Indigenous Program up to speed with what is happening with the boys and the program at Scots - well done (Indigenous Program sponsor, email, The Scots College).

Project schools emphasised that for communication to be effective, students and family members need to feel comfortable contacting and communicating with staff and believe that reaching out to the school will result in answers to questions and proposed resolutions to concerns. Several schools implemented surveys to students and family members during the initial stage of the project (for example, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, Kinross Wolaroi School, Calrossy Anglican School, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, and Canberra Grammar School). Surveys varied across schools, however there were instances of common questions in areas such as communication with staff, and perceptions of staff care for Indigenous students, families, and communities.

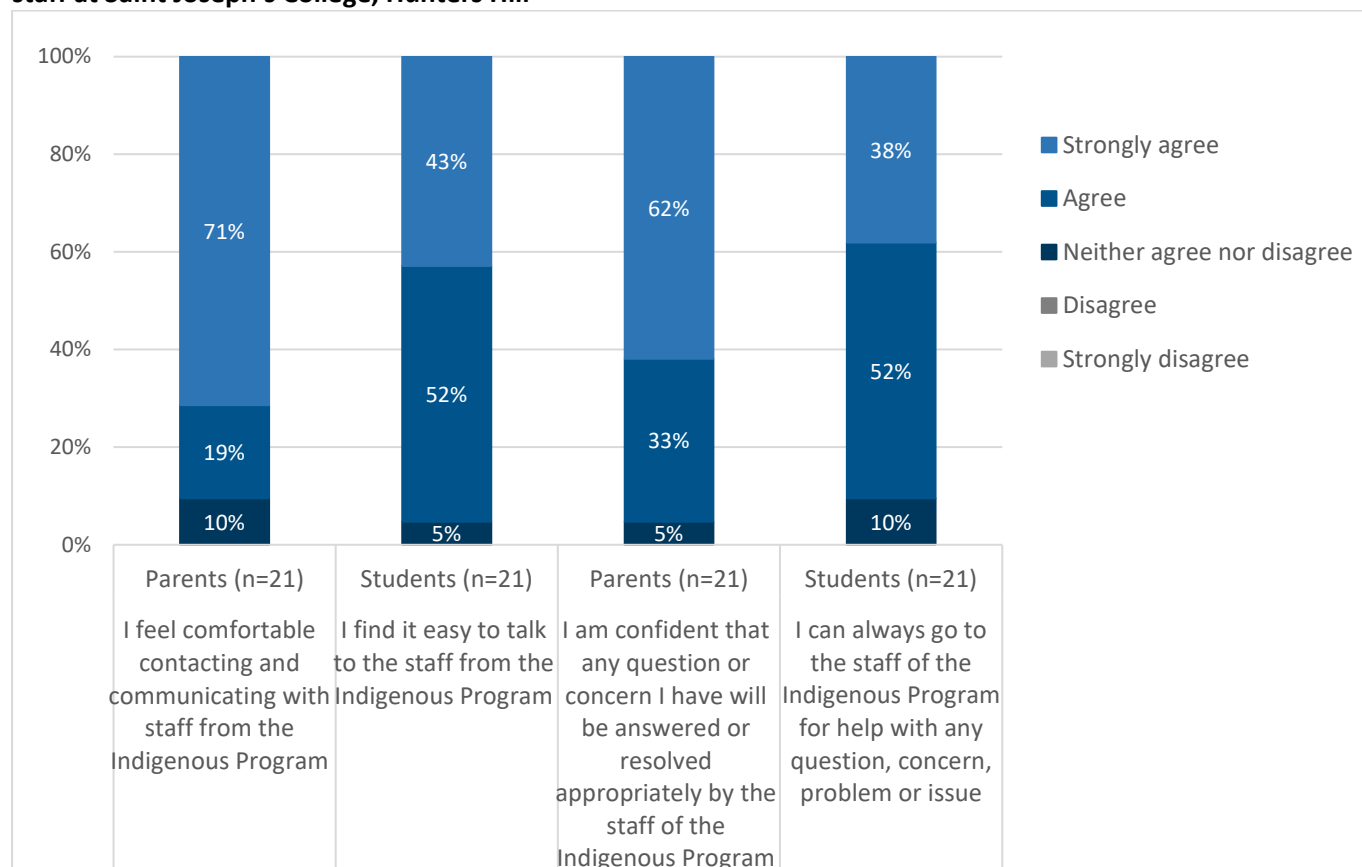
Available data from three schools showed that 56 per cent (n=23) of family members surveyed strongly agreed they felt comfortable contacting and communicating with staff, while 34 per cent (n=14) agreed and 10 per cent (n=4) neither agreed nor disagreed (Aggregate survey data, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Kinross Wolaroi School, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Similar results emerged when family members were asked about their confidence that their questions or concerns would be answered or resolved appropriately by school staff: 54 per cent (n=22) strongly agreed, 36 per cent (n=15) agreed, and 10 per cent (n=4) neither agreed nor disagreed (Aggregate survey data, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Kinross Wolaroi School, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

Results from surveys conducted at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill provided strong positive evidence that Indigenous students, and particularly their family members, found Indigenous Program staff approachable and available to answer questions and address concerns (Figure 26). Although these were baseline findings from the first iteration of the survey, comments from one parent suggest that improvements in communication had already occurred.

All of my questions, issues and concerns have been attended to and I feel comfortable in bringing forward any concerns that I have. There are actions taken that show the [Indigenous Program] team have listened to concerns such as...the communication we receive on the events and the boys (Parent survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Students also commented on the approachability of Indigenous Program staff, sharing that a staff member “makes it really easy for me to talk to him” and that “it feels like I am talking to a friend when I talk to the Indigenous staff” (Student survey, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

Figure 26. Parent and student comfort and confidence in communicating with Indigenous Program staff at Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill



Family and community voice in decision-making

Schools reported involving family and broader community members in school decision-making processes in a number of ways. Most frequently, efforts to provide family members with a voice in their child’s learning experience were centred around the development of personalised learning plans (PLPs). Schools modified processes to intentionally include parents in the creation of PLPs – for example, by sending families drafts of their child’s goals as articulated in PLPs and inviting them to accept or book a time to discuss further with staff (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College), or reaching out and meeting with parents for input into PLP development prior to students commencing their studies at the school (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst). Future opportunities to engage Indigenous community members in the personalised learning process were reported as well, with plans in place to consult with Elders on culturally appropriate ways to implement PLPs (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

Working through PLPs with students and their families was a successful tool that staff at Calrossy Anglican School used to gather and share information between families, the wider community and school staff members (Project report, Calrossy Anglican College). Long distances resulted in family members being unable to attend initial PLP discussions, so Indigenous Program staff re-scheduled meetings during the return to school period at the start of 2020 to ensure they could be part of the

process. Staff investigated using FaceTime or Skype conversations for follow-up PLP meetings, and the response from parents and staff was encouraging:

That is a wonderful idea and will help us when working with the Indigenous students (Staff member, direct communication, Calrossy Anglican College).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families were explicitly asked to contribute their ideas on ways to ensure their voices were heard in decision-making processes at The Scots College. Nineteen family members and their sons, representing 12 different communities in Australia, participated in the Voice, Visioning and Connection workshop in 2019. The workshop provided opportunities for connections between families and communities, creation of a collection of shared values, and conversations about the role that culture plays in the success of young Indigenous people. Analysis of themes emerging from the workshop was compiled in a key findings document, with recommended actions including: the establishment of a parent communication group and a support group for fathers, regular face-to face meetings, and the inclusion of local Indigenous families into the mentor program.

Scots is striving to create equity and equality for all its students. To achieve this a truly culturally responsive pedagogy must be enacted that not only embeds culture in the learning but it must also ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard as decision makers, advocates and leaders within the school environment. Providing opportunities for Indigenous parents to connect with each other and build a network is critical for success (The Scots College Indigenous Parent meeting: Voice, Visioning and Connection report, Rachel Elphick and Nathaniel Tamwoy).

Parent feedback after the workshop indicated a sense of motivation and empowerment to take the initiative towards greater involvement in school life and the school community.

We now the Indigenous community of Scots must showcase our culture, annually or in some way not only to the teaching staff and students but to their parents as well (Parent feedback following workshop, email, The Scots College).

Family and community engagement

i. Engagement in the school environment

Family and community engagement through school-wide activities and events generated significant positive interest and enthusiasm and contributed to strengthened relationships. Indigenous celebrations such as NAIDOC week were expanded to include cultural events planned with parents, grandparents, and community elders. Connections formed during occasions to specifically engage families of Indigenous students, such as Family Barbeques and Indigenous Parent dinners were recognised and appreciated by students and family members.

Strong connections were made with the First Nations Program Coordinator, First Nations Cultural Mentor, teachers, boarding master, principal, medical staff, house staff and support staff (Parent feedback on Indigenous Parent dinner, Family survey, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

The Family barbeques on Friday are a great time to connect and reach out and see everyone's family and the areas they come from and would be great to do more activities like this (Student survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

The project team from Shore described the inaugural Family Weekend and Fun Day as “ground-breaking” for the school (Project report, Shore). Prior to this event, families of Indigenous students had never been invited to come together at the school and get to know each other as a group. A case study provides evidence of the impact of this family engagement on an Indigenous student, especially in relation to his social behaviour with other Indigenous students (Box 2).

Box 2. The impact of family engagement through the Shore Family Weekend: Sam*

In the past Sam had been a ‘loner’ and disengaged at school.

During the Family Weekend, his grandparents, two sisters and mother came and spent the weekend with us. Sam was raised by his grandparents and has only recently become reacquainted with his mother and sisters.

During the Family Fun Day at the zoo, Sam started walking with the Director of Inclusion and his grandmother. Within an hour he was asking his younger sister which animal she wanted to see and ensuring the group visited this animal. By the evening family barbeque, he was sitting with his mother and sisters and happily enjoying a meal and shared conversation.

The following week, when the families had returned home, Sam sat with two other students at the regular Koori Club Yarning Circle lunch meeting and shared his pizza with them while they shared stories about the weekend.

(Project report, Shore) *Not student’s real name

ii. Engagement in the local community

Several schools reported progress in building and strengthening relationships in the local community. Initial discussions with local Indigenous parents and school representation at local AECG meetings proved particularly helpful in leading to relationships with local Indigenous communities. Ngunnawal Elders and a local consultant provided knowledge to inform a cultural program for Indigenous students, as well as the development of a school Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and the role of an Indigenous staff member as a student liaison officer (Project report, Canberra Grammar School). Strong partnerships with the local Guringai Community were instrumental in supporting Indigenous students to ensure that their culture is kept strong, even though they are far from home and ‘off Country’ (Project report, Knox Grammar School). Community engagement through organisations like the Opportunity Hub helped reconnect and build trust between school and the local Gamilaroi community, leading to the implementation of culturally appropriate programs and workshops for Indigenous students (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School)

iii. Engagement in students’ home community

Several schools reported positive outcomes for school, family and community relationships associated with ‘on Country’ visits to Indigenous students’ home communities. These visits allowed staff to meet and engage with each student’s entire support network, including parents, community Elders and primary school teachers (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview). As described in section 5.1.2, these visits often formed the critical first step of Indigenous students’ transition into the school. Staff met families within students’ homes, took time to try on uniforms, and helped families with downloading and using school apps and completing Health and School Permission forms. The purpose of the visits was to:

Build trust between family and school and strengthen this relationship...so the student feels like they know a familiar face as well as what to expect when they arrive [at school] (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School).

Provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the community, the families and the students and therefore allow for specific and individualised understanding to be fed back to College staff so that teaching and care of each student is as personalised and effective as possible (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Feedback from families supported the important role these community visits have in working towards strengthened and culturally informed relationships. A family member of an Indigenous student shared with the Indigenous Coordinator that it was:

absolutely exceptional that...you come out and visit with us all in our home towns. I can tell you that you have left a great mark in our little town and many have been inspired because of people such as you.... (Family member feedback, email, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

One Indigenous student suggested that it was "easy to talk to staff from the Indigenous program because it feels like they know what happens in the Aboriginal community" (Student survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill). Results from surveys conducted at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill showed strong agreement (86%, n=18) from Indigenous students and their parents that staff genuinely care about their family and community. One student observed that the "the staff are always in contact with my family and are always offering help to my family to come and see me" (Student survey, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill). Efforts by staff to connect with and deepen their understanding of Indigenous students' familial and cultural contexts, as well as recognise the importance of bringing families together, were supporting progress towards strengthened and culturally responsive relationships between school, family, and community.

Project staff comments in their reports and interviews demonstrated an awareness that building strong relationships with family and community is a long-term endeavour. One school commented that "it takes time, it's taken four years to build these relationships (Interviewee 8). The interviewee noted that "as teachers we're impatient and want to know all the answers straightaway, 'tell me about this child's background'". A Kempsey Adventist School staff person explained that "[p]ositive, trusting relationships are the key to success and can take significant time to create, sometimes years in the making." This important observation from schools suggests that with time and ongoing commitment, activities described above will continue to contribute to the schools' progress towards this outcome.

7. Progress towards increased school capacity to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires the capacity and commitment of school staff, leadership, and the school as a whole. Foundational school and staff outcomes are represented in the Waratah Outcomes Framework by a strong and resilient stalk or rootstock that supports relationships between schools, Indigenous students, families, and communities, as well as supporting the Indigenous students themselves. All project schools shared progress on building staff capacity to support Indigenous students through increased knowledge skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices (Outcome 8). In some schools, investment in and support for learning and development opportunities to increase staff capacity was reported as a reflection of school leadership engagement in the project and the commitment of school leaders to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Outcome 9). Progress to integrate Indigenous culture across the whole school was reported by most project schools, with evidence of increased acknowledgement and awareness of Indigenous culture, and efforts to embed Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum and school life (Outcome 10).

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

7.1.1 Strategies and activities to increase staff capacity and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices

Strategies

Strategies to support staff to develop their capacity and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices were reported by all project schools. Culturally responsive pedagogical practices draw upon students' previous experiences, cultural knowledge, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning more meaningful and relevant, and include teaching and learning methods and practices that recognise the importance of including students' cultural backgrounds in all aspects of learning²¹. Schools described approaches to developing the cultural competency of anything ranging between one or two key staff to the entire staff community, often through a suite of complementary professional learning and development programs and opportunities. This included professional development for teaching, boarding, medical, sports, wellbeing, learning enrichment and administrative staff. Some project schools whose strategies targeted a smaller number of staff initially, subsequently employed a 'ripple effect' approach by having staff who had participated in external cultural learning programs involved in delivering internal development opportunities to colleagues in order to share their learnings more

²¹ Gay, Geneva. "Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. (2001 AACTE Outstanding Writing Award Recipient)." *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2002, p. 106+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/apps/doc/A83732906/AONE?u=uts&sid=AONE&xid=a6763378>. Accessed 7 Aug. 2020; Boon, H.J. & Lewthwaite, B.E. (2016). Signatures of quality teaching for Indigenous students. *The Australian Association for Research in Education*, 43, 453-471, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/docview/1889681230?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprim

widely. Staff also reported increased capacity and confidence through engagement in this pilot project and learning both within their school networks and across the project more generally (see 8.1).

Activities

Activities undertaken by network schools to increase staff knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices include:

- professional learning and development programs delivered by external organisations
- professional learning and development delivered at school with support from external facilitators
- professional learning and development delivered at school by school staff
- staff attendance at external conferences and meetings
- whole-school responsibility for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- whole-school pedagogical change.

A summary of the broad types of professional learning and development activities undertaken by project schools is provided in Table 9. All 16 project schools reported participation or enrolment in at least one of these activities.

Table 9. Summary of professional learning and development activities reported by project schools

Professional learning and development program or opportunity	Proportion of schools reporting participation or enrolment % (n)
Professional learning and development programs delivered by external organisations – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Stronger Smarter Leadership Program</i> - <i>Connecting to Country</i> - <i>8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning</i> - AISNSW Professional Learning courses - <i>Berry Street Education Model</i> 	63 (10)
Customised professional learning and development delivered at school with support from external facilitators – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Home Away from Home</i> - <i>Crossing Cultures: Hidden Histories</i> - <i>Knox Boarding Wellbeing Conference</i> - <i>Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week</i> 	44 (7)
Staff attendance at external conferences and meetings – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>AISNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference</i> - <i>AISNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Boarding Conference</i> - <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Education NSW Conference</i> 	44 (7)
Customised professional learning and development delivered at school, by school staff – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional Development Day workshops - Lunchtime or after school workshops or sessions - Sessions at staff meetings - Informal professional learning through direct consultation and support 	38 (6)

i. Professional learning and development programs delivered by external organisations

Over 60 per cent of project schools (63%, n=10) reported participation or enrolment in professional learning and development programs delivered by external agencies and organisations. As highlighted previously in section 6.1, these programs provided professional development in Indigenous pedagogies, promoting positive cultural identity, high expectations relationships, trauma-informed practice, general cultural awareness training, and learning opportunities specific to local Indigenous cultures and histories. The programs most frequently reported by project schools are listed above in Table 9 and described below.

- The *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program*²² is based on strategies to enable success for all children, including acknowledging and developing a positive sense of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in schools, as well as supporting the establishment of high expectations classrooms and teacher and student relationships. Delivered by the Stronger Smarter Institute, the program provides tools and support to school and community leaders to enhance their capacity, challenge their assumptions, and contribute to positive changes in education. Several project teams reported on either staff participation in the program (Project reports, Barker College, Kempsey Adventist College, Knox Grammar School, Loreto Normanhurst), or commitment for staff to participate in upcoming iterations of the program (Project reports, Calrossy Anglican School, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School, Pymble Ladies College, Taree Christian College).
- *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning*²³ is an Aboriginal pedagogy framework expressed as eight interconnected pedagogies involving narrative-driven learning, visualised learning processes, hands-on and reflective techniques, use of symbols and metaphors, land-based learning, indirect and synergistic logic, modelled scaffolded genre mastery, and connectedness to community (Figure 27). The professional development program supports educators in reflecting on their own personal cultural orientation to learning, and in exploring and implementing the framework to enhance teaching through rather than about culture.

²² Stronger Smarter Institute (2017). *Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach*. Stronger Smarter Institute Position Paper, <https://strongersmarter.com.au/resources/high-expectations-relationships/stronger-smarter-approach-position-paper/>

²³ Regional Aboriginal Education Team, Western Area. NSW Department of Education and Communities (2014). *8 Ways: Aboriginal Pedagogy from Western NSW*, RAET, Department of Education and Communities, Dubbo, NSW.

Figure 27. 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning pedagogy framework²⁴



- *Connecting to Country*²⁵ is an Aboriginal community cultural awareness teaching program that offers educators the opportunity to engage directly with Aboriginal people at the local community level. Developed by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), the course supports teachers to increase their understanding of local Aboriginal culture, history and social experience through cultural discourse and conversation. Project schools reported participation in *Connecting to Country* experiences on local Aboriginal country, including Bundjalung and Dunghutti country (Project reports, Casino Christian School, Casino High School, Kempsey Adventist School).
- AISNSW Professional Learning courses and events²⁶ provide school leaders, teachers, and boarding staff with opportunities to develop their capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be successful and confident learners. Courses provide learning for staff about supporting Indigenous students from cultural, wellbeing and academic perspectives. Project schools highlighted staff participation in the AIS facilitated courses *Understanding Trauma in Aboriginal Communities* and *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in PDHPE K-6* (Project reports, Calrossy Anglican School, Knox Grammar School).
- The *Berry Street Education Model*²⁷ is a practical approach to teaching and learning with a focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, and families. The program supports teachers to learn and implement pedagogical strategies incorporating evidence-based trauma-aware teaching. The model and its application in schools is particularly well-suited to

²⁴ 8 Ways Online, <https://www.8ways.online/>

²⁵ NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (2020). *Connecting to Country*, <https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-programs/connecting-to-country/>

²⁶ The Association of Independent Schools of NSW Ltd., <https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/courses>

²⁷ Berry Street (2020). *Berry Street Education Model: Curriculum and Classroom Strategies*, <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/sites/default/files/BSEM-Brochure-2020-05.pdf>

strengthening a whole-of-school approach, encouraging consistency in student-centered strategies that provide all school staff with the knowledge of how to foster student willingness and capacity for school achievement. As previously highlighted in section 6.1, all staff from Kempsey Adventist School participated in the four-day training course *Berry Street Education Model* in 2019 and Term 1 2020 (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

School decision making regarding which professional development programs to participate in was in some instances influenced by a combination of recommendations from Indigenous staff within the school and the local Indigenous community. One project staff person for instance explained that they were guided by their local AECG, who recommended staff undertook *Connecting to Country* rather than the *Stronger Smarter Program*:

We sent five of our staff away to *Connecting to Country*. And that's something which is run by the local AECG. They were very strongly in favour of us doing that rather than sinking our resources into *Stronger Smarter* and it's because they have such a strong ownership of Aboriginal ways in this area, and they want us to be aware of that (Interviewee 6).

ii. Professional learning and development delivered at school with support from external facilitators

Project teams also reported engaging external facilitators, consultants, and other contributors, to provide customised professional learning and development programs and opportunities at school. These learning opportunities included sessions at internal school conferences and staff-wide professional development days, as well as workshops targeted towards a particular staff group – for example, boarding staff, the pastoral care team, and the school counselling team. Examples include the *Crossing Cultures: Hidden Histories* program for boarding staff at The Scots College, the *Home Away from Home - Supporting Aboriginal Girls in the Boarding Environment* three-part workshop series for the pastoral care team at Loreto Normanhurst, and the booking of an Indigenous psychologist to run professional learning to build skills to support Indigenous students at Pymble Ladies' College (Project reports, The Scots College, Loreto Normanhurst, Pymble Ladies' College).

Staff at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill were able to volunteer to attend sessions throughout *Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week* to gain registered professional learning accreditation hours. This program brings "an experienced educator on Indigenous spirituality, kinship systems, traditions and history of the Kija and Ngyaranyin People of the Kimberley Region in Western Australia to reside at the school and embed these perspectives and knowledge into the curriculum across a range of subjects" (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, see also 7.3). In 2020:

26 teachers receiving specialised and authentic cultural awareness in areas such as The Stolen Generation, Intergenerational Trauma, Kinship Systems, Traditional Ceremony and Identity. Information from these sessions directly responds to aspects of the syllabus in curriculum areas of Religious Education, History, English, Art, and Languages. Staff are able to directly transfer knowledge and information from these sessions into their own lessons (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

There were also examples of network schools supporting each other by offering their skills and knowledge through external facilitation at in-school events. Project staff from Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview provided a presentation on the positive impact of a Cultural Mentor for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander students at the *Knox Boarding Wellbeing Conference* in 2019, and Canberra Grammar School engaged project staff from Kinross Wolaroi School to provide cultural competency training for key staff (Project reports, Knox Grammar School, Canberra Grammar School).

iii. Professional learning and development delivered at school by school staff

Project staff shared their enhanced skills, knowledge, and experience in implementing culturally responsive pedagogical practices through both formal and informal in-school learning and development opportunities for their colleagues. Customised formal learning opportunities were provided by project staff at sessions and workshops delivered on regular Professional Development Days, lunchtime or after school, and at staff meetings. This staff-facilitated learning covered topics such as culturally sensitive programming, incorporating Indigenous culture and perspectives into the classroom, high expectations relationships, and trauma-informed practices. For example, project staff at Shore hosted an “afternoon session each term for interested staff on Indigenous perspectives, including subjects such as student perspectives of boarding [and] supporting Indigenous students with a background of trauma” (Project report, Shore). Staff who participated in external programs such as the *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program* and the AISNSW course *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in PDHPE K-6*, included aspects and activities from these programs in their subsequent facilitation of professional learning for their colleagues in school (Project reports, Calrossy Anglican School, Knox Grammar School, Loreto Normanhurst).

Informal professional learning was also provided in schools by project staff through consultation and support. The First Nations support staff at Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview provided “direct consultation with each academic faculty to discuss targeted approaches to supporting Indigenous students, with an emphasis on implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices with particular students in their classes” (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview). Project staff also described informal professional learning that took place through the process of feeding back to staff “deep understanding of each [Indigenous] student” developed through “engagement with families and communities” in order to “guide classroom and boarding house practice” (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

iv. Staff attendance at external conferences and meetings

Several project schools reported staff attendance at external conferences, events, and meetings as additional opportunities for staff to develop their cultural awareness and competency. Frequently mentioned conferences included the AISNSW *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference* and the AISNSW *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Boarding Conference*, as well as the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Education NSW Conference*.

v. Whole-school responsibility for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Some schools focused through the project on creating whole-school collaborative networks to ensure a web of support for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A number of school project staff explained previously there had just been one or two staff with responsibility for this support. For example, in one school:

....the biggest thing for us has been that there's just now so many more staff involved. So it literally was just me. And then with the funding we were able to send me and three other people to the *Stronger, Smarter* course....And so there's just now so many more staff on board with the project who are aware of the issues, who know the kids, who can support the kids (Interviewee 13).

Other schools focused from the outset on a whole-school collaborative approach:

And one of the goals that we had right at the beginning is ensuring that it's a multidisciplinary approach. It's not just one person leading it. It's not X, it's not myself. It's all these people coming together for the one student and we've had multidisciplinary meetings where there's 25 people in the room for one student. We've got the healthcare professionals, we've got the paraprofessionals that are coming in, the IT side, we've got speech and language, but then we've got other pockets, you know, teachers, coaches, you know, we bring everyone in together to make sure that it's not just the sole focus on stats and data. It's not the sole focus on building culture. It's all in everything together (Interviewee 8).

vi. Whole-of-school pedagogical change

One project school undertook whole-of-school pedagogical change to create learning experiences that increase the engagement outcomes of all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The adoption of Project Based Learning (PBL) pedagogy across Kempsey Adventist College occurred during Phase 1 of the *AISNSW Pilot Project: Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*²⁸. The approach was further supported throughout Phase 2, during which all secondary teachers participated in the *PBL 201* professional development course facilitated by staff from PBL Works in the United States of America²⁹. *PBL 201* is a three-day advanced PBL workshop designed to develop teaching practices and strategies that help strengthen the quality of student work in a PBL classroom. "As part of this training there was an expectation that all teaching staff would be responsible for writing and delivering a PBL Unit" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College). Further details related to this activity are reported in Section 7.3 of this report.

7.1.2 Evidence of increased staff capacity and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices

Project schools reported significant impact upon staff awareness as a consequence of activities undertaken through the project, including of Indigenous culture generally, and of specific cultures represented in the school and local community.

Increased staff awareness of Indigenous culture

Some project staff explained that their awareness of Indigenous culture was deepening as a consequence of their engagement in professional learning, and that this was an ongoing process of continual learning.

²⁸ Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, UTS, 2019. *AISNSW Pilot Project: Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. Final Evaluation Report*, Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW).

²⁹ Buck Institute for Education PBLWorks, 2020. *PBL 201: Improving the Quality of Student Work*, <https://www.pblworks.org/pbl-201-workshop-improving-quality-student-work>

I feel like my professional knowledge and understanding has developed so much for a number of reasons my cultural understanding, you know, of Indigenous culture, and also the local Indigenous culture, like for me, *Connecting to Country* was one of the best things I've done. It was so good. And I think it was good to do after *Stronger, Smarter* and it kind of layered on for me. And yeah, I just feel like I'm learning all the time (Interviewee 10).

Through this process project staff were becoming more aware of and questioning their previously held assumptions about and expectations of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students. This was leading to changes in attitudes and behaviours, including deeper listening that contributed to increased awareness and appreciation of Indigenous culture.

I think there were some people who were quite adamant that they knew how it should be and sort of not necessarily open to listening to other perspectives, and defensive, and I think the *Stronger Smarter* process even for me, you know, I shifted my view and perspectives and it made me question some of my own assumptions and prejudices. I think that was quite significant for some and quite pronounced....You know, we still have a long way to go. But trying to be more open to listening to how things could be (Interviewee 5).

I'm without a doubt it's made me a better teacher and educator. But one of the key things that I've learned through all of this is it's made me better at just sitting down, shutting up and listening. So things like, I haven't been this year but last year, I went to some AECG meetings and that was just I've never been so quiet in the meeting and just absorbing everything. And with the boys, with the families with the communities, just listening and learning that way (Interviewee 11).

For some staff the professional development lead to a major shift in their realisation of their low awareness and understanding of Indigenous culture:

We had six staff members go along to [*Connecting to Country*], staff members who thought they knew about relating to the Aboriginal community. Their comments were, we had to come to the point of realisation that we know nothing. And we need to learn and start from scratch (Interviewee 6).

Some schools determined baseline levels of staff cultural awareness through staff and student surveys and interviews, and then used findings to support planning for targeted staff professional learning and development. Staff at Taree Christian College were surveyed about their understanding of local Biripi culture. Most teachers rated their understanding as either 'a little' (36%, n=9) or 'moderate' (48%, n=12), while only a small proportion (12%, n=3) rated their understanding as 'good' and none rated it as 'outstanding' (Staff survey, Taree Christian College). These results supported the school in identifying and committing to further cultural training for staff in 2020, including *Stronger Smarter Leadership* and *Connection to Country* programs (Project report, Taree Christian College).

Interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Loreto Normanhurst in 2019 revealed student perceptions on the levels of cultural awareness amongst staff. Students commented that "teachers don't really engage in class discussions about it" and suggested that teachers might not be "confident themselves" (Student interview, Loreto Normanhurst). Some History teachers were perceived by Indigenous students to be "good with the past stuff like colonisation", but one student reflected that "only a few teachers really know anything about our culture" (Student interview, Loreto Normanhurst). Project staff reported that cultural awareness of

staff had subsequently increased through staff participation in professional learning and development opportunities such as the *Stronger Smarter Leadership* and the *Home Away from Home* programs. The project team reflected positively on progress made and had plans to reinterview Indigenous students again in 2020 to “determine if students have noticed a shift in cultural awareness now that members of our leadership team and wellbeing team have had access to cultural awareness training” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Project schools reported increased staff awareness of Indigenous history and culture following participation in cultural awareness training.

The staff members that have already participated in *Connecting to Country* have significantly bettered the depth of their insight into the myriad of social, cultural, historic, economic and political issues that continue to affect and concern Aboriginal peoples and communities as well as learn firsthand the concept and meaning of country from an Aboriginal cultural standpoint (Project report, Casino High School).

In response to the *Crossing Cultures: Hidden History* workshop examining the impact of policy implementation on Australia’s First Nations Peoples, 80 per cent (n=4) of boarding staff surveyed at The Scots College agreed that participating had increased their knowledge of Indigenous history (Staff feedback survey, The Scots College). To best describe feelings and emotions inspired by this workshop, staff selected words such as ‘interested’, ‘sad’, ‘curious’, ‘pleased’, ‘angry’, ‘willing’, and ‘frustrated’ (Staff feedback survey, The Scots College). These responses highlight mixed and confronting emotions experienced by staff when learning about Indigenous history in Australia.

Project staff also observed that increased cultural awareness resulting from staff participation in professional development programs could lead to significant shifts in staff beliefs, and subsequent willingness to learn more about Indigenous cultures and perspectives.

...changing beliefs is not easily solved... but they can be changed for the better. *Stronger Smarter* has been instrumental in this change. It now means that we have demand from our staff to access *Connecting to Country*. Prior to *Stronger Smarter*, this interest was almost nil (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

Schools recognised that cultural awareness was “something that takes a considerable amount of time to shift and also share on a whole school level” and emphasised the importance of prioritising how outcomes from professional learning for staff “will be embedded... to ensure that the growth from these programs is more wide-spread and not lost” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Improved cultural competence of staff

In addition to increased staff cultural awareness, project schools reported increased staff cultural competence following targeted professional learning programs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and pedagogies.

Being involved in the project has enabled us to increase the number of our staff who have cultural competency training. This has not only improved our relationships with Indigenous students and their families but has led to an increased level of awareness of and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and perspectives across the teaching and support staff (Project report, Barker College).

The [*Stronger Smarter*] program has enhanced our cultural awareness and cultural competence and provided us with more confidence, not only in managing student issues, but in providing leadership to other staff in this area (Director of Pastoral Care, Loreto Normanhurst).

Being from New Zealand you know things there are so different and then being open to how things work here, the protocols and my responsibility as someone who lives and works on Dunghutti Country to know what my responsibilities are to the culture and the people here, it's made me more mindful when planning, I want to ensure that I connect and learn from the students as well as you know, they from me (Interviewee 18).

Several project teams reflected on the role of professional learning in challenging underlying assumptions and positively enhancing staff understanding of the cultural context and experiences of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

This training shifted my thinking from an emphasis on students' behaviour to a focus on the needs and feelings of the students to find out what is driving their behaviour. In that way we will be a trauma sensitive school for all students... it's honestly the best training I have ever undertaken and it challenged my assumptions about the Aboriginal students and now I look to supporting them more in culturally specific ways (School leader, Direct communication to project staff, Knox Grammar School).

I do think that there's been quite a shift in terms of staff awareness, and staff interest, in understanding the complexities of the Aboriginal students' backgrounds and the complexities of supporting them and having cultural awareness (Interviewee 5).

Staff feedback on a presentation about the role and importance of cultural mentoring facilitated at the *Knox Boarding Wellbeing Conference* by project staff from Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, suggested that this learning experience had successfully challenged assumptions that staff may have held about Indigenous students. Staff reflected that they "learnt a lot", "now realise why a cultural mentor is important" and "need to think about culture more", and acknowledged that they "presume so much about the boys' communities" and had "so much to learn" (Staff feedback, *Knox Boarding Well Being Conference*, Knox Grammar School).

Increased staff confidence and implementation of culturally responsive practices

Project schools provided evidence of the positive impact of staff professional learning and development on staff confidence and capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

I guess that predictive caring....trying to walk the line between not making assumptions, but also providing the additional support as required....instead saying, as with any other kid in the school, you know, provide the opportunity, provide the safety net, be there ready to go. I mean, I've got a shelf full of school uniforms here and, you know, be ready with, be able to help, but don't assume that help is required. So, I think for me, it's been about embedding that or trying to embed that in every day, being mindful of that (Interviewee 13).

The other thing I've learned is that relating to Aboriginal communities takes a lot of time. They really don't want things rushed....It's been a learning experience for me. You know this as a principal, you know this as a good teacher, that relationships are key (Interviewee 6).

I feel I have more authentic conversations with Indigenous students at the school than maybe I did in the past. I'm not saying that they were totally inauthentic, but I think I just have a stronger cultural awareness and sensitivity, which means I think that my interactions and conversations with them are richer because of it (Interviewee 20).

Staff reported incorporating Aboriginal practices such as 'yarning' and sharing circles into their classrooms and boarding houses, and pedagogies such as the *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning* directly into "assessment task templates" and "units and lesson plans" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

I learnt that we can use yarn circles to support education. And include the eight ways of learning in my programs to cater for Aboriginal students (Staff feedback following *Connecting to Country* program, Casino Christian School).

Staff members who attended the AISNSW *Understanding Trauma in Indigenous Communities...* have included strategies into their house meetings and on our various boarder camps e.g. the sharing circle using wool to connect (and dramatically disconnect) as an example of building connections and how for our Aboriginal students these have been disconnected (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

Advice provided on "how best to program using appropriate and endorsed Indigenous resources" supported staff in "creating the link between their programs and the Gamilaroi people, land and culture", with an emphasis on how "best to use these resources in a culturally sensitive way" rather than "a token visit or mention" (Project report, Calrossy Anglican School).

There was evidence that professional learning to support staff in their understanding of the impact of trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, and communities had "increased [their] level of confidence in appropriately communicating with Indigenous students" (Project report, Shore), and "provided teaching staff with a number of strategies to help recognise and manage trauma within the classroom" (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College). In a survey sent out to teaching staff at Kempsey Adventist College after the *Berry Street Education Model* program took place, 72 per cent (n=13) of secondary staff who completed the training indicated that they thought it was worthwhile, and four staff identified specific student engagement and inclusion strategies such as 'brain breaks' that they had taken away from the training.

Similarly, staff who attended an internal professional learning opportunity focused on supporting Indigenous students with a background of trauma reported changing daily strategies when interacting with Indigenous students. One teacher experienced positive results from the change in approach to communicating with an Indigenous student, remarking "It didn't take much for me to find out more and now he seems more interested in most of our lessons" (Teacher, direct feedback, Shore).

Project staff from Indigenous Program and First Nations Support teams also reported strategies to ensure that their knowledge and skills benefited staff through informal learning opportunities.

Project teams provided evidence of teacher consultation with Indigenous Program staff about culturally appropriate and sensitive approaches to inviting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to share information about their culture relevant to subject matter studied in class. For example, a teacher at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill observed a previously disengaged Indigenous student take an interest in a subject area related to their culture, and asked Indigenous Program staff for advice on how to build on this interest in a culturally appropriate manner. This teacher expressed their desire to "successfully respond to [the Indigenous student's] interest of their own cultural background but deliver it in a sensitive way that still meets their learning needs" (Teacher, email, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill). This form of professional learning support extended across the wider school community, with staff from Out of School Hours programs requesting support on how to "refer respectfully to Aboriginal people and their rich culture" (Out of School Hours Co-ordinator, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

Project schools provided examples of teachers wanting to engage Indigenous students appropriately in subject areas related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People that may contain challenging and confronting themes and issues – for example, the Indigenous aspect of a Year 10 Rights and Freedoms unit taught at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, that examines injustices perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples in Australia. In response to a request for support from the teacher, the First Nations Cultural Mentor suggested a number of approaches to ensure cultural sensitivity, including making the acknowledgement that "some of these topics and some information could be hurtful and thought provoking for our current students both First Nations and non...making that acknowledgement that yes we are learning about the histories of [Indigenous students'] peoples, but [also] learning what is all of our history, together...", as well as offering opportunities for further conversations and debriefing with both staff and students as required (First Nations Cultural Mentor, email, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview). In these instances, staff confidence and capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices was reinforced through informal and ongoing dialogue and consultation between colleagues in schools.

In summary, some staff have been profoundly and permanently changed through their engagement with the project, including the activities above, and also the project activities and relationships experienced with Indigenous peoples within and outside of the school.

This has been the most impactful professional development I've ever done in my life. The growth that I feel like has come out of this for me as not only educated but just as a human, a good human has been so impactful for me.... I've learned so much, our car trips our plane trips, just X [Indigenous Coordinator] talking to me about all sorts of issues and insights and these four years have had a profound effect....Just being guided by X and other First Nation families that I've come into contact with (Interviewee 8).

7.2 School leadership are engaged, supportive and committed to improving academic and other outcomes for Indigenous students (Outcome 9)

In Phase 1 of the Pilot Project, strong and committed senior leadership was identified as a critical enabler in achieving change in all project schools. In Phase 2 it was both an enabler of change and an identified intended outcome, with schools describing a 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.

7.2.1 Strategies and activities to increase school leadership engagement, support, and commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Strategies

Strategic engagement with and from school leaders was described by schools as critical to the project's success across several outcome areas. This involved developing strategies to encourage school leaders to make deep and impactful change in Indigenous education.

We have recognised the importance at this time of engaging the College Executive team more fully in improving outcomes for the College's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through relating their own interests, skills, and portfolio areas to Indigenous education. We aim to assist these staff and their teams to connect in an authentic manner with goals of the Indigenous education project in order to realise more lasting change in the project overall (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

For some schools, support from school leaders was inherently integrated into project design given the leadership role that Executive staff such as Principals and Deputy Principals held in the project, as well as in the school overall.

Activities

Activities undertaken by network schools to increase engagement, support, and commitment from school leaders to improving outcomes for Indigenous students included:

- professional learning and development opportunities for school leaders
- active involvement of school leaders in improving outcomes for Indigenous students.

i. Professional learning and development opportunities for school leaders

Project schools reported engagement of school leaders in professional learning and development opportunities supporting increased cultural awareness, competency, and understanding of issues and approaches required to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Staff with leadership roles across the school and boarding house, and in particular areas of focus such as teaching and learning, academic support, and student wellbeing or pastoral care, participated in professional learning and development programs described in section 7.1.1 – for example, *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program*, *Connecting to Country*, and the *Berry Street Educational Model* (Project reports, Casino Christian School, Kempsey Adventist School, Knox Grammar School, Loreto Normanhurst). One school also described deep cultural engagement of a school leader through participation in an Indigenous immersion experience. The Deputy Principal accompanied two Year 9 students, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, on a cultural immersion to Arnhem Land, Northern Territory in 2019 (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

ii. Active involvement of school leaders in improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Some project schools reported on the active involvement of school leaders in working towards improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In some instances, school leaders were already actively involved in the AISNSW project, taking a leadership role in developing and implementing strategies and activities, as well as participating in and contributing to meetings,

discussions and workshops both within their school and across the project's school network. One project staff person described that:

The senior leadership are very aware of the project and have a really good understanding of what's happening because I sit on that team and my role coordinating the program means they can get knowledge and understanding fairly easily and fairly quickly. So they are really very supportive, and really actively involved (Interviewee 2).

I'm on the leadership team. So in that sense, that makes it easy for me to be quite vocal, and push things that I want doing (Interviewee 9).

I guess my voice at that senior executive level has helped advocate, not as much as I'd like (Interviewee 11).

Within schools, issues around the education and welfare of Indigenous students were increasingly on the agenda at meetings "at an Executive level", and school leaders communicated project activities and progress to Executive bodies such as School and College Councils through updates at regular meetings, monthly reports, and research publications (Project reports, Knox Grammar School, Pymble Ladies' College, Shore).

7.2.2 Evidence of increased school leadership engagement, support, and commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Increased awareness and engagement of school leaders in Indigenous culture

Project schools reported increased cultural awareness amongst school leaders following their participation in professional learning and development programs. One school described a "shift in cultural awareness and joint ownership of the care of our Aboriginal students" amongst school leaders that had been increasingly apparent since the school's involvement in the project (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst). Programs described previously in section 7.1.1 such as the *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program* and *Connecting to Country* were highlighted as instrumental in increasing awareness and engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture amongst school leadership.

The school was already competent and high functioning in these areas, however the [cultural] awareness has grown and is shared more widely since training in *Stronger Smarter* occurred with key members of our leadership team (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Casino Christian School reported how engaging directly with Bundjalung community through *Connecting to Country* had been "informative for the school leadership as they grow in their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture" (Project report, Casino Christian School). These opportunities for dialogue provided space for school leaders and other staff to listen to and learn from local Indigenous community members, and to take steps forward in their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community.

A Bundjalung community member identified our school as a school that was not interested in Bundjalung people. The staff member replied that may have been the case under the old administration but the leadership team at Casino Christian School are very much wanting to engage with Bundjalung culture (Project report, Casino Christian School).

There was also evidence of school leaders directly communicating their engagement with Indigenous culture through sharing of their own cultural experiences with the school community. Following a cultural immersion to Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, the Deputy Principal and two students gave a presentation on their experiences and learnings about Indigenous culture to the Year 7 to 12 assembly (Figure 28, Project report, Pymble Ladies' College). Inclusion of local Indigenous language by school leaders in their addresses at school events was also reported - for example, the Year 12 farewell address from the Principal at Pymble Ladies' College included the Dharug phrase 'didjurigura yanu' to say 'thank you and goodbye' to the graduating student cohort (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).



Figure 28. Title slide of Deputy Principal and student presentation, Pymble Ladies' College

Increased understanding of requirements for improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Through participation in cultural learning programs, consultation with AISNSW *Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* project staff, and active involvement in the project, school leaders developed increased understanding of the requirements and issues involved in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Project schools reported increased awareness and knowledge amongst school leaders of the importance of support programs for Indigenous students, including enhanced academic support, "career mentors and opportunities for work experience", and programs "for our Aboriginal students to support their leadership development and confidence" (Project report, Knox Grammar School). A school leader reflected on the development of their own understanding of the requirements for improving outcomes for Indigenous students, as well as the importance of supporting improved cultural awareness and competence across staff:

As this year has progressed and I've been involved in... workshops with the AIS, I feel that I am starting to develop better skills and knowledge to best support the diverse needs of our boarding Indigenous girls... Having all staff with an understanding of trauma and training in supporting students... will help us ensure we are creating an environment of trust. We will be able to progress further and develop girls with greater future opportunities if we can always ensure we create a sense of belonging (Boarding House staff, email, Pymble Ladies' College).

Project staff emphasised the importance of increased understanding amongst school leadership of Indigenous student needs, as well as effective and culturally responsive approaches to improving

outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Culturally informed and aware school leaders were described as “champions of the cause” who could make “an enormous difference to achieving progress in this area” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Increased support and commitment from school leaders towards improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Project schools reported on the importance of support from senior leadership for progressing initiatives to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This included strategic support from school leaders that contributed to a “whole-of-school approach” and “key top-down steps that [made] a positive impact on how staff, students, and parents of the College recognise and value Indigenous culture and perspectives” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).

Key elements of supportive school leadership were their overt valuing of the project and trust in project staff’s capabilities and decision making.

And most importantly, the Principal must value the program. Most importantly. That's it. Like it doesn't actually matter about anything else. If I can walk into the Principal's office and I have his ear....I go in there, I talk directly to him about the things I want to do, what I perceive value in, and I'll have his ear.... [the Executive team convey that] we value what you're saying. We clearly, you know, have faith in your autonomy and your ideas and like that might be personality related, but I think that's the importance of having your Executive team valuing your contribution (Interviewee 1).

[The Principal] has started these conversations, so it's started to be seen as of real importance within the school.... and that's just really a shift in the start of 2020, I think. The back end of the project. That was something that I was concerned about early on, but I've started to feel that there's a there's a shift happening..... that kind of allows for other people outside of the Executive team to sort of share leadership as well (Interviewee 7).

We just feel the general total unconditional support and trust [from the Principal]. We honestly don't even talk to him that much. But when you do he seems to know what's happening and the intricacies of it (Interviewee 4).

[The Principal’s support] is completely ongoing and unwavering, he has complete trust in [the Indigenous Cultural Mentor] in the decisions he makes for the wellbeing of the boys....I just don't know how we would have kept going at the pace and having the momentum that we did without him. We've got Executive members that are supportive, but it's driven by him (Interviewee 8).

The willingness of Exec to work with us as staff through this period of transition. With *Stronger, Smarter* and *Berry Street* it wasn't just here you go, you go do it, this is what I want you to do. They walked with us and they actually went through the program, both programs with us (Interviewee 10).

Support from school leaders in the form of recognition of staff contribution to progress made by Indigenous students was also highlighted as important. In sharing observations and reflections on the growth of Indigenous students at the school, school leadership recognised the importance of the role of the Learning Support Team:

Many staff have contributed to this growth; however, the role that your team has played has been integral to the girls' success. So, the purpose of email is thanks - thank you for all that you have done to support the learning of these girls. (School leader, email to Learning Support Team, Pymble Ladies' College).

Project staff commented on the extent to which consultation and "conversation building with senior leadership has been really important in progressing initiatives" (Project report, Shore). Consultation with staff and stakeholders across the school was effective in securing support from senior leaders for future strategies and activities to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, even beyond the scope and timeline of the current project. Commitment from school Senior Executive to Indigenous Student Programs was demonstrated through funding for new and existing positions specifically intended to monitor and support the needs of Indigenous students, and approval for the future participation of staff in cultural professional learning and development programs (Project reports, Knox Grammar School, Pymble Ladies' College, Shore). Longer-term commitments from school leadership were evidenced as well, such as engagement in the development and public launching of Reconciliation Action Plans, and willingness to "set in plans for the next five years to work to further best practice in the program" (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

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

Whole-of-school change through acknowledging, valuing, and integrating Indigenous culture and perspectives into the curriculum and school life is the foundation for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes and wellbeing in the school environment. The approach undertaken and the pace of change varied widely according to each project school's unique culture and history.

7.3.1 Strategies and activities to acknowledge, value, and integrate Indigenous culture and perspectives into curriculum and school life

Strategies

Most project schools reported intentions to integrate Indigenous culture and perspectives across the whole school at some level, ranging from acknowledgement and celebration of Indigenous culture at school-wide events to whole-of-school pedagogical change. Project teams observed connections between progress in this and other outcome areas, resulting in a positive feedback loop whereby integration of Indigenous culture throughout the school contributed to improved outcomes for Indigenous students, families and staff, and consequently led to further cultural change across the entire school community. For example, project staff at Pymble Ladies' College, reflected that "the strategy of supporting students to develop a sense of identity and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage is contributing to the whole-of-school approach to improving Indigenous education" (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College). Strategies applied to the whole school emphasised the creation of a school environment where "the tolerance of all cultures is paramount" to "enable trust and open dialogue for change" (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

Activities

Activities undertaken by project schools to acknowledge, value and integrate Indigenous culture and perspective into curriculum and school life included:

- celebration of school-wide events acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture
- creation of school-wide visual signposts and symbols acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture
- embedding of Indigenous pedagogy, culture, and perspectives into the curriculum.

i. Celebration of school-wide events acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture

School-wide cultural events were important ways for project schools to acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous culture. The practice of Acknowledgement of Country was incorporated as an expected part of school assemblies and gatherings, and events such as the NAIDOC week assembly and activities, Reconciliation Week activities, the Annual Sorry Day Walk, and Indigenous Sport Rounds were described as prominent features on the school calendar. Section 5.3 of this report examined the effect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation and leadership in these events on the strengthening of Indigenous students' connection to their culture. This section is focused on the impact of these events on the awareness and valuing of Indigenous culture across the wider school community.

ii. Creation of school-wide visual signposts and symbols acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture

The creation of visual signposts and symbols acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture was also an important activity towards increasing awareness of and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture across the school. Project teams described examples such as murals featuring Indigenous symbols and artwork, Indigenous sports jerseys and armbands, badges designed by Indigenous students and worn by all students with or as part of school uniform, Acknowledgement of Country plaques, and official school flags representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. A few schools also reported on the development of school-wide signage, described by one school as "visual acknowledgement to First Nations Peoples" (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

iii. Embedding of Indigenous pedagogy, culture, and perspectives into the curriculum

Many schools reported activities that purposefully integrated Indigenous pedagogy, culture and perspectives into the curriculum. These activities included Indigenous language programs and units for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledges into learning resources and activities in individual subject areas, showcasing and broadening students' access to fiction and non-fiction Aboriginal writers and books exploring Aboriginal perspectives in school libraries and creating and maintaining Native gardens in collaboration with local community. As highlighted in section 7.1, integration of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges across the entire curriculum occurred in whole-school initiatives – for example during *Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week* at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, and through the embedding of Project Based Learning (PBL) and Indigenous pedagogy at Kempsey Adventist School.

7.3.2 Evidence of increased acknowledgement, valuing, and integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives into curriculum and school life

Increased whole-of-school awareness and acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and perspectives

Whole-of-school events and prominent placement of visual signposts and symbols acknowledging and honouring Indigenous culture increased awareness of Indigenous nations, history, and practices throughout the entire school community. Through the work of the project, schools reported taking a deeper and more intentioned approach to school events and activities related to Indigenous history and culture, such as Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week (Figures 29 and 30). “Opportunities to share culture and celebrate” at NAIDOC Week events were described as a “significant turning point” for the school community (Project report, Canberra Grammar School): “we had the whole school sitting on the grass and he initiated this smoking ceremony and talked the students through the significance of it and he was captivating” (Interviewee 2).



Figure 29. NAIDOC Day artwork, Casino High School



Figure 30. NAIDOC Day mural, Casino Christian School

Active involvement and contribution of Indigenous students, staff, and community in school-wide events was evidenced through the delivery of Acknowledgement of Country and speeches, creation and sharing of artworks, and performance of cultural practices and dance (see also 5.3). Project teams reported increased Indigenous student, staff, and community leadership and voice in these events, resulting in enhanced authenticity of the cultural experience and learnings for the whole school community.

Whilst we have celebrated NAIDOC day on three occasions in the past, this NAIDOC celebration was the first time that it was headed up by an Aboriginal educator. [Educator name] planned the whole event including a passionate speech on the topic of Voice, Treaty, Truth. This was challenging for our school community to hear first-hand how important it is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised as being the traditional custodians of their land (Project report, Casino Christian School).

Project schools described how events such as NAIDOC Day had evolved throughout the project, expanding to be “a day of cultural activities developed with community” (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff collaborated to design and create artworks as part of cultural events and activities (Figure 29 and 30). In some instances, the outcomes of these initiatives outlasted the cultural event itself, and inspired plans for future initiatives.

Students designed a mural for the NAIDOC celebration. The mural was completed by mostly Aboriginal students but also some non-Aboriginal students in Years 7 – 10. This mural was put together for NAIDOC Day and now hangs in the foyer of the administration office. There is a desire amongst staff and students that in the new year we will create a large, quality mural to go on the external wall of our visual arts building (Project report, Casino Christian School, Figure 30).

Some schools reported that whole-of-school celebrations of Indigenous culture associated with events such as NAIDOC week, had extended beyond the classrooms and school assembly hall, and onto the sports fields in the form of Indigenous Sport Round (Figure 31 and 32).

Initially suggested by one of our previous [Indigenous] students... an ‘Indigenous Round’ of sport is held annually at the school... the Round provides an opportunity to celebrate Indigenous cultures and recognise the contribution Indigenous people have made and continue to make to both sport and greater society. This year, each player wore armbands designed by one of our Year 11 students, with the design representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures coming together in our school community (Project report, Barker College, Figure 31).



Figure 31. Indigenous Sport Round armband and announcement, Barker College



Figure 32. Designs for Indigenous Sport Round jerseys, Canberra Grammar School

A few schools reported ongoing dialogue and collaboration with local indigenous communities on the design and creation of visual signposts acknowledging and honouring local Aboriginal culture and country. For example, Acknowledgement of Country plaques for school campuses that feature carvings by a local Aboriginal artist (Project report, Knox Grammar School), and school signage in the local Gathang language (Project report, Taree Christian College).

Increased integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives into the curriculum and school life

Aboriginal language programs and units were introduced at a number of project schools - for example, Wiradjuri language programs at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Canberra Grammar School. The AECG language program was introduced to Stage 1 students at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School in 2019, with 74 non-Indigenous students learning the Wiradjuri language alongside their Indigenous peers (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School). Barker College reported creating a unit on Dharug language and culture to be taught to the entire Year 7 cohort in Term 4 of 2020, with unit content reviewed by Elders at every stage of development (Project report, Barker College).

A program supporting student learning about Indigenous culture more widely was also reported. All primary school students at Taree Christian College attended compulsory lessons in Koori culture, which included “storytelling, traditional dance, art, music, Gathang language, and my mob history” (Project report, Taree Christian College).

This is a unique set-up as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students learn and participate in these lessons together. We have observed that generally speaking all students enjoy going to these lessons and participate actively in the practical elements (Project report, Taree Christian College).

Further evidence of project schools’ integration of Indigenous culture and perspectives into the curriculum emerged from the embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices and knowledges into programs and teaching activities associated with specific subjects. A newly

developed Visual Arts group open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Years 7 to 11 at Loreto Normanhurst had the aim of celebrating “Aboriginal culture within the school community along with the success and strength of Aboriginal women in society” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst, Figure 33).



Calling all budding artists!

Applications are open to all students who would like to participate in an art program which will commence in Week 4 this term and continue into Term 1 2020.

Figure 33. Art Program invitation to students, Loreto Normanhurst

Within the classroom, Year 7 Visual Arts classes at Knox Grammar School experienced presentations involving Indigenous artefacts held in the school Archives, and the school’s work to return them to Aboriginal communities. During the planning process, the teacher explained the intentions for the presentations:

I would really like to... connect you with two of my Visual Arts classes in Year 7 who are making artwork connected to the changing history of the land around Circular Quay. They want to hear any stories/facts you may know. To hear from another well researched staff member some context to the issues we discussed around the inaccuracy of history and the dispossession of the First People from their land or see any of the artefacts which may help them to connect more authentically with the conceptual links in their artwork (Teacher, email, Knox Grammar School).

Through these and other presentations the school’s Head Archivist is challenging assumptions and discussing the ethical issues around ownership of sacred, ceremonial and cultural objects with the aim of all objects being returned to communities, and as an example explains that seeds collected on a Northern Territory scientific expedition “were taken to an elder in Walgett to grow in his traditional agricultural plot” and will in future be shared with the school’s native garden (Project report, Knox Grammar School).

Because of the project, in one school the staff focused on the “the awe and wonder aspect of understanding Indigenous culture rather than the challenges. And I think there's been a shift to that. And that's visible in a lot of different ways” (Interviewee 20). An example of this was the approach to teaching science in the school:

In our Science programs, we're moving towards starting each unit with the Aboriginal perspective, it's about focusing on the awe and wonder of Aboriginal Indigenous contributions and perspectives in Science and placing it at the beginning of the unit....to emphasise the importance of it...So we spend a few lessons doing that and then move on to how Science over time has built on the foundations of what Aboriginal people did, in terms of increasing our understanding of whatever the topic is. So in Year 7, they're doing the universe. So it's looking at Aboriginal ideas around astronomy and how the rest of what we know about astronomy, in terms of a scientific perspective is built on that initial foundation, underpinnings of that (Interviewee 20).

Stage 6 Extension Science students participated in learning activities designed to embed and promote understanding of Indigenous practices and knowledges.

The program allowed students to use historical examples to evaluate the contributions of cultural observational knowledge and its relationship to Science through linking these to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Astronomy. Students looked at Indigenous Australians' development of several practical ways to observe the sun, moon, and stars to inform navigation, calendars and predict weather (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

Student responses to this activity included evidence of learnings about the contribution of Indigenous knowledge in relation to Science.

The ability for Indigenous people to interpret the stars through astrology, for example the Great Celestial Emu allowed the people of Wiradjuri nation to know when emus were nesting and when to harvest eggs. Their interpretation of constellations, the moon and dust clouds throughout the year allowed for the interpretation of an ever changing sky (Student reflection, Pymble Ladies' College).

The embedding of Indigenous perspectives and resources across a broad range of subject areas occurred throughout *Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week* at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill (see also 7.1). This annual event was organised and facilitated by the staff of the Indigenous Program with support from an Indigenous educator who resided in the College for the duration of the program.

In 2019 over 600 students from 30 different classes across six curriculum areas attended sessions or seminars dedicated to Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in their subject area (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Cultural learning through the program was encouraged for school staff as well, and staff were able to volunteer to attend sessions as registered professional learning accreditation hours.

Several staff have extended the *Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week* rationale into their own personal lesson plans within their classes as they personalise their curriculum to engage

with individual Indigenous students and embed their cultural knowledge and perspectives into their methodology (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

The application of Aboriginal pedagogies encouraged inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum. At Casino High School, teachers “have been able to utilise [the *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning*] framework to add a culture perspective to all Key Learning Areas (Project report, Casino High School). Whole-of-school pedagogical change involving the application of Project Based Learning (PBL) and the integration of Aboriginal pedagogies across the curriculum was implemented in the secondary school at Kempsey Adventist College in order to engage and improve outcomes for all students, including Indigenous students (see also 7.1).

We are committed to striving to be a 'best practice' school in Aboriginal education, with a focus on 'how we do it here' for everyone, rather than as an isolated strategy. We welcome the opportunity to be part of this project because it is changing the lives of our Aboriginal young people and enriching the lives of our non-Aboriginal students and staff too (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

In PBL, students worked in groups on projects about real-world issues and complex questions that encourage collaboration, creativity, and high order thinking skills as well as deeper content knowledge and understanding. When asked what they liked about PBL, half of Aboriginal students surveyed (50%, n=6) highlighted either collaboration or creativity. As well as being delivered in key curricular areas, PBL was the foundation for the *Festival of Creativity*, a holistic five-day student-led program for Year 7 to 10 students (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College).

Outside of the curriculum, project schools reported evidence of integration of Indigenous culture into other aspects of school life. An Acknowledgement of Country written by Indigenous students with guidance from staff was printed inside the front of the school diary distributed to all students at the beginning of the year (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College), and an Indigenous student's artwork was “chosen for the honour of being displayed on the Year 12 Graduation booklet in 2019” (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst, Figure 34). As an important and “symbolic linking of Indigenous culture to the traditions of the College”, an artwork created by Indigenous students at Pymble Ladies' College was presented to the Principal on Jacaranda Day, a highly significant whole-of-school event that is deeply connected with the history of the College (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College, Figure 35).

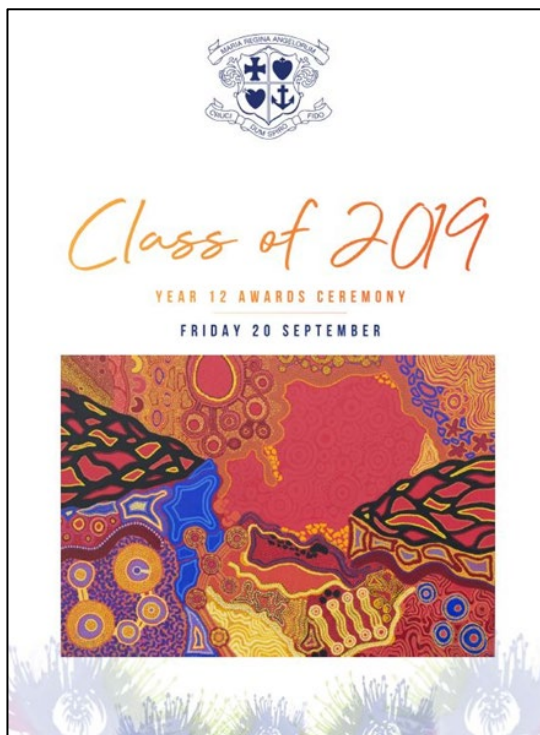


Figure 34. Indigenous student artwork on 2019 Graduation booklet, Loreto Normanhurst

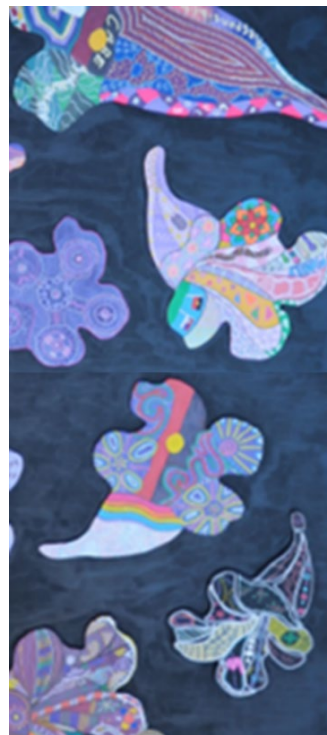


Figure 35. Indigenous student artwork for Jacaranda Day, Pymble Ladies' College

Increased whole-of-school valuing and respect for Indigenous culture and perspectives

Whole-of-school change in valuing and respect for Indigenous culture and perspectives is a challenging aspect of this project that requires long-term commitment in terms of implementation and evaluation of multiple initiatives. There were promising signs that shifts in cultural awareness and competence in school staff and leaders have occurred in Phase 2 of the project, and contributed to changes in understanding and attitudes towards Indigenous students across the wider school community (see 6.1.2, 7.1.2 and 7.2.2). As cultural assumptions were broken down and replaced with cultural awareness and understanding, relationships across the school community were strengthened. Opportunities for all students to reflect on their understanding of Indigenous culture and perspectives and how this influences their relationships within the school community were provided during Reconciliation Week. The Reconciliation Week theme in 2019, '*Grounded in Truth: Walk Together with Courage*', led to Stage 5 students at Pymble Ladies' College creating an interactive display based around the visual representation of a tree (Figure 36 and 37).

The roots and grass contained truths and facts about our nation's history and information about Indigenous culture. The leaves were formed by paper hands and students were asked to add their reflections using their knowledge, an attitude of gratitude, hopes for the future, or a message about an Indigenous person who had influenced their awareness (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

Student reflections and comments recorded on the display provided evidence that Indigenous culture and perspectives were highly valued and respected by these young people.

Indigenous culture has made scientific breakthroughs in terms of sustainability, 60,000 years before Western Science (Student reflection, Pymble Ladies' College, Figure 37).

I hope for more Indigenous representation in government and hope to see Indigenous languages learnt more in schools (Student reflection, Pymble Ladies' College).

A positive impact made on me was from my friend, she taught me about their culture and shed a new light (Student reflection, Pymble Ladies' College).



Figure 36. Reconciliation Week tree, Pymble Ladies' College

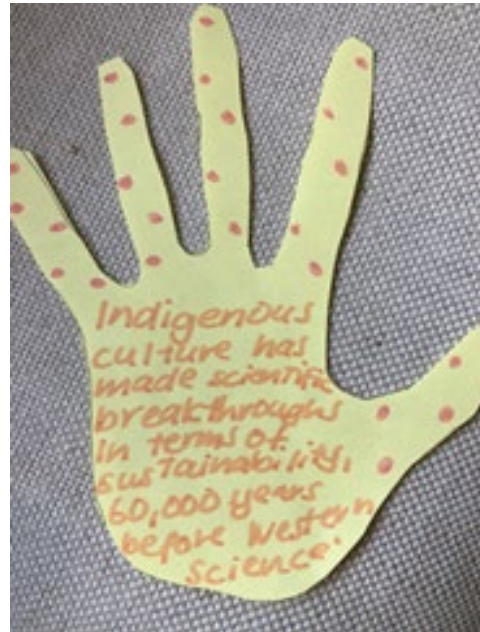


Figure 37. Student reflection posted on the Reconciliation Week tree, Pymble Ladies' College

One school described the process of change whereby increased cultural safety in the school was building students' confidence to express their pride in culture, and that this in turn was pressuring the school to improve its acknowledging and valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and culture.

And it was really beautiful this year, a couple of the younger kids in particular really spoke up in classes during Reconciliation Week. And their teachers were coming in telling us this, and I think that's because they feel safe, but also partly because the school culture has shifted enough to make that possible.... The increased pride in culture that we've seen from individual kids and also the Indigenous student community as a whole also just keeps that cycle going because it holds the school to account, the school has to acknowledge we do have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids here, we need to step up. And you know, teachers in class need to think more mindful about what they say and how they teach, because kids are going to challenge them (Interviewee 13).

Some schools expressed their awareness of and gratitude for the ways in which the school community was enriched by their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including both students' individual qualities and their contribution to breaking down racist perspectives and progressing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reconciliation.

It's also about cultural safety, and how the boys are teaching us as a school. It's not like we're doing them a favour....the depth the boys bring through their presence, just the variety of personalities, abilities, skills, thoughts and friendships even has just given us much more depth here....there's a, the value of these boys and I don't mean it in a monetary sense or anything, but the growth and the beauty they bring to our school as a culture is really, really important and celebrated (Interviewee 14).

Our boys have been real ambassadors for genuine reconciliation and a breakdown of racism. The Indigenous boys in their understanding and leadership and what's required of them in terms of stepping up and being positive role models in the community. That is something that has come out of positive relationships and positive conversations and they've really determined that Reconciliation Week here was incredibly positive. And they did that because they have positive relationships with the non-Indigenous boys and they have conversations with non-Indigenous people...So that's a big impact (Interviewee 9).

The perspectives of Indigenous students themselves provided a critical barometer of levels of respect for their culture within the school community. When asked the question “Do you feel your culture is respected in this school?”, an Indigenous student responded:

Yes, when we participate in Aboriginal dancing as part of NAIDOC week everyone is respecting, listening and watching. It hasn't always been that way (Indigenous student, focus group, Kempsey Adventist School).

Such comments from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students suggest that care and respect were “being shown towards their culture whereas perhaps in the past this may not have been the case” (Project report, Kempsey Adventist College). Progress towards authentic change in school culture and values is a complex process that takes time to achieve and demonstrate, however evidence from project schools showed positive indications of increased valuing and respect for Indigenous culture and perspectives across schools and school communities.

8. Evaluation of the school hub and spoke network model

In Phase 2 of the pilot project the 16 schools were organised into four networks of four schools each. In each network, a Phase 1 school acted as the hub for three of the Phase 2 spoke schools (see 1.3.1). The external evaluation investigated whether the network model was effective in supporting the achievement of enhanced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes in networked schools. In particular the evaluation aimed to identify the model's effectiveness in achieving the intended outcomes of:

- enabling hub schools to share with spoke schools their learnings and experiences regarding improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and the impact this may have had on the schools' projects
- facilitating support and collaboration between the project schools to successfully develop and implement their project activities
- developing new ideas, approaches or resources that would improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The evaluation also aimed to identify whether this model would support scaling up of the project to encompass more schools in the future.

8.1 Evidence of the effectiveness of the hub and spoke network model

Schools provided qualitative and quantitative feedback on the effectiveness of the model in their project reports, including providing responses to a five-point rating scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' regarding key intended components of the model (Figure 38). Further evidence was collected through the interviews with project staff in each school.

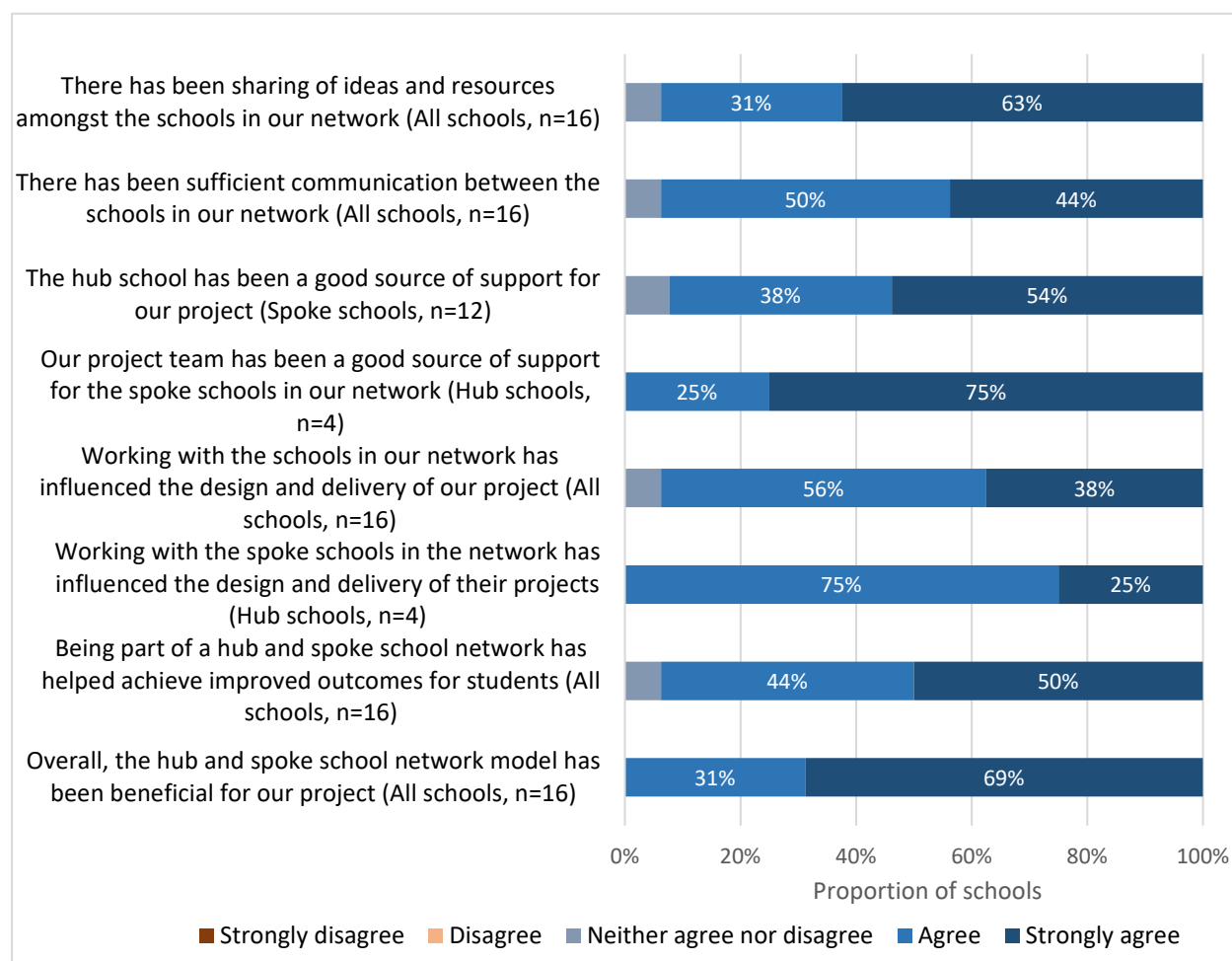
The project schools reported high levels of satisfaction with the overall functioning of the model including as a mechanism for sharing and generating ideas and resources and supporting the design and implementation of their projects. Ninety-four per cent of schools agreed/strongly agreed that being part of a network helped them to achieve improved outcomes for students, and 100 per cent of schools agreed/strongly agreed that the model was beneficial for their projects. One school commented that "the most important element [of the project] has been the learning that we've been able to share with other schools and bring back to our school contexts" (Interviewee 2).

Two dimensions of the model were central to its success: schools sharing and providing each other with mutual support, and the injection of guidance and expertise from the more experienced Phase 2 schools. One school commented this "[s]haring of experiences and challenges and successes is crucial to achieving better outcomes for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students" (Project report, Knox Grammar School) and another school that the:

project has a strong community feel and the 'we are all in this together' attitude has been refreshing. People have been generous with their time, resources and expertise which has enabled us to fast track our progress and avoid making the same mistakes of the past (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School).

The strengths of the school network/hub and spoke model are explored in more detail below.

Figure 38. Hub and spoke schools' opinions on network resource sharing, communication, support, influence on project design and delivery, and the overall benefits of the hub and spoke model (as reported at interim stage).



8.1.1 The network model connected schools and enabled mutual support and the sharing of experiences

Schools reported that the model was effective in connecting schools with each other, and in enabling mutual support and the sharing of experiences. This included the reassurance project staff derived from knowing that difficulties and challenges were shared and that they were not alone in their experiences. Just to “actually sit down with” other schools, talk about priorities and hear about what had made a difference for other schools was beneficial (Interviewee 13).

Connecting with each other and being able to talk about experiences, both positive and negative, and learning about ways they handled things. It gives each school an opportunity to acknowledge each other's contexts. Their successes, challenges and failures (Project report, Taree Christian College).

It's been really good, really good in that way we're connecting with schools because sometimes you think that's just a problem for you. And then you talk and someone else raises it and you're like, oh, yeah, that's happened with me as well and how they worked around it or, or even just knowing that they're experiencing the same problem is all you need to know (Interviewee 12).

An important dimension of this was that talking with others helped schools in “just knowing where to start almost” (Interviewee 13). It gave project staff the confidence to initiate their projects, with this support being especially important for spoke school staff who had had little prior experience in developing programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

I gained a lot of confidence, understanding, skill by hanging out with the guys in the other schools in our team, visiting their schools, listening to what worked, what didn't work, being felt really supported by [Hub school project staff] that was, that really helped me to take my baby steps, I think (Interviewee 9).

The network has been very helpful. We started this project with very little understanding of how to work effectively with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Project report, Casino Christian School).

Schools described the networks as providing them with a ‘safe space’ for sharing their experiences, within a context of mutual support and encouragement. Staff explained this was a positive environment compared to the oft-felt sense of competition between schools.

As Phase 2 has progressed the four schools in our hub and spoke network have continued to form a strong, safe space. This has allowed for more sharing of ideas, discussing concerns openly and the providing of honest feedback (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).

....it's such a safe place that you could fail. And that you could learn and you could grow and we were all in for the same cause, if you like, and so we were willing to share and learn (Interviewee 9).

In some instances, networking with schools experiencing similar challenges and operating in similar contexts was helpful to schools.

It has....been beneficial to work with schools from regional areas as we have found we have some similar challenges/opportunities. This has included all of us experiencing significant bushfire distress along with the challenges many regional communities face (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

Project staff commented that the model worked to build useful relationships both with staff *in other* schools, but also *within one's own* school, and this contributed to progressing the project.

....they've been great relationships to have just to ask questions, to have those contacts outside of school where, you might say, well actually I just don't know how to navigate this, or I don't know what the cultural sensitivity around this might be. And to be able to have other people that you can talk to about that has been really useful....now I feel like I have my own network that I can utilise to actually make progress (Interviewee 5).

....those occasions of travel and just being with another colleague and pushing each other to develop and to action things that we needed to do to advance a program context (Interviewee 2).

8.1.2 Hub schools effectively shared with spoke schools their learnings and experiences to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

A main feature of the hub and spoke network model was the mentoring and leadership role Phase 1 schools provided to the new Phase 2 schools. This role was articulated by project staff from Phase one school, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill who explained that "it's really been like a critical friendship relationship where we're able to give really good sound advice, out of experience" (Interviewee 9).

The greatest focus of our support as a hub school for our networks has been the aim to provide a comfortable sounding board for questions about potential strategies and activities that spoke schools might be looking to implement, as well as providing an example of methods of implementation along with what worked effectively and where we went wrong (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

The project staff approached this through establishing early on in the project regular communication and support, and understanding and learning from each other's widely different contexts through school visits, resulting in "healthy relationships between all staff members and schools within the network" (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

Spoke schools in all four networks indicated that they greatly benefited from the direction, guidance and support of the Phase 1 schools, with hub schools being great sources of knowledge "from the data collection to the writing of the report" (Project report, Casino High School). This was the case across all four networks.

[Project lead name] and her team from Kempsey Adventist College have been willing and able to share resources, ideas and advice. We have been encouraged to stay on top of things. We have had opportunities to ask questions of each other. I know I could always contact [project lead name] or someone on her team to clarify something or give advice how they may have handled situations (Project report, Taree Christian College).

[Hub school project team names] have been our 'oracles' when it comes to learning from experience. They have already faced many of the challenges and successes we are currently experiencing and were able to advise on what did (and equally as importantly, what didn't) work in such circumstances. It should also be noted that they have been incredibly responsive and helpful in sharing knowledge, resources and ideas whenever we needed them (Project report, Shore).

Riverview have been excellent in keeping us informed of the requirements of the grant and sharing their prior learnings with our network. Whenever we needed clarification or encouragement the staff from Riverview were accessible and generous. Learning about their approach to community engagement and also the tracking of student growth via data has been beneficial (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Our project benefited from the support of Pymble especially when we were having meetings in Sydney and were able to discuss problems we were experiencing and as Pymble are two years into this process they were able to offer suggestions for how to overcome these, especially in relation to getting staff on board and students engaged with different projects and opportunities offered through the project (Project report, Calrossy Anglican College).

It is important to note that while hub schools provided experience, leadership and guidance, they too learned much from their spoke schools, with one hub school commenting that “[f]rom the perspective of the hub school, it has been highly valuable to understand the varied contexts of the different spoke schools, their individual communities and their respective programs” (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).

8.1.3 The hub and spoke network model generated new ideas, perspectives, and resources

Schools’ feedback indicated that the network model went beyond schools building each other’s confidence and providing mutual support. It expanded schools’ horizons regarding how much more they could be doing for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

We are at the very earliest stages of supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Whilst we have lots of ideas and good will, discussing projects with the hub and spoke schools has raised our awareness of just how much more we can be doing for our students (Project report, Casino Christian School).

We have had our field of view widened to other programs and what is possible, which we have all mutually benefited from (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Seeing and experiencing each other’s “different contexts has allowed us to reflect on our perspective/lens and compare oneself, gaining a deeper understanding of why some programs and activities do or don’t work” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College). This is causing schools to rethink and re-evaluate their own contexts and approaches, and from there move to the next stage of trialling new practices. Schools provided many specific examples of how learning from each other was encouraging them to question and change their practices and introduce new approaches.

- Canberra Grammar School noted that the “[s]poke schools gave us confidence of employing academic and cultural mentors/tutors” and that they “would not have gone down the psychometric screening pathway if not for the guidance provided by hub school including sharing of resources, suggested e-mail to parents and justification of approach (Project report, Canberra Grammar School).
- Saint Joseph’s College, Hunter’s Hill noted that they learned extensively from other schools’ progress in cultural safety in their communities, how they celebrate culture within their schools and how they engage with local Aboriginal community members and organisations (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill).
- Pymble Ladies’ College benefited from “comparing numeracy and literacy programs and how they are run” (Project report, Pymble Ladies’ College).
- Macquarie Anglican Grammar School implemented a “range of programs” across their day and boarding communities as a consequence of learning from other networked schools, such as a BBQ prior to the commencement of the year for all the “Indigenous families at our boarding facility....A simple idea that has proven to be effective elsewhere and I expect will be effective at Macquarie” (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

The network model was described as enabling schools to progress towards improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students faster than otherwise would be the case.

I think a lot of Indigenous education over the last probably 20 or 30 years has been trial and error. And probably people have been making the same mistakes and finding the same

result. I think that the hub and spoke avoids that. You know, we're drawing on people's knowledge and experiences in avoiding, in fast tracking programmes and avoiding working through some of those obvious short failings. I think that's really good (Interviewee 1).

The model also stimulated sharing with other schools besides those in one's own network.

And I think because there was so much sharing, I've noticed that more outside the hub and spoke as well. So with more with I guess, schools close to Pymble. Because everyone's been sort of sharing amongst their hub and spokes there's been a lot more sharing, you know, in our geographic area of ideas and things like that or programmes (Interviewee 7).

8.1.4 Professional learning was stimulated through the hub and spoke network model

Schools' feedback indicated the hub and spoke network model provided valuable opportunities for professional learning. This included the informal learning occurring across all the project's intended outcomes because of hearing about and witnessing other schools' approaches to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes. As one school explained, "...just that professional networking opportunity. We've had to go and visit and appreciate different environments and then bring that learning back into our context" (Interviewee 2).

The additional resourcing and organisational capacities through the networks also enabled formal professional learning opportunities. One example was the organisation within one network group to participate in the *Stronger, Smarter* program, which had the double advantage of providing professional learning in supporting Indigenous students, while further cementing strong relationships between the schools.

The relationship between the network of schools has developed as the project has evolved throughout 2019. This was strengthened by our participation in the *Stronger Smarter Leadership Program* (Phase 1, four days, and Phase 2, two days). This provided more opportunity to understand school contexts, project aims and strengthened relationships of key members involved in each school (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Stronger, Smarter really facilitated those relationships because the people in our hub were part of the *Stronger, Smarter* course. So I think I felt like I got to know them really, really well (Interviewee 5).

Completing the *Stronger Smarter* cultural safety program was one of the most positive aspects of working within our school network. Being able to attend the course within the hub-group context had a positive impact on our group relationship, building authentic relationships in a short space of time. Completing the program was beneficial as it provided skills to take home to our own schools and programs. Moreover, the program was beneficial to the hub group's connection and from this, our overall performance. Attending the program together made the group feel more connected in the following network meetings and created an atmosphere that supported better communication of ideas constructive to developing our programs (Project report, Barker College).

8.1.5 Cross-sectoral sharing occurred through the network model

Phase 2 of the project extended beyond the independent school sector to include one public school, Casino High School. This was a successful development that benefited schools in sharing and learning from each other.

Casino High School have been working with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in an extremely effective way for a long period of time. They have had funding to provide that level of support for a long time. It is beneficial to work with a State School that is much further down the track than we are (Project report, Casino Christian School).

Having a department school in our network was also good for a different perspective (Project report, Taree Christian College).

.... the ways in which they're promoting cultural awareness in their schools, we've gone, 'okay, well maybe we can look at doing that' (Interviewee 15).

8.2 Challenges with the hub and spoke network model

While there were many benefits of the hub and spoke network model, there were also associated challenges.

8.2.1 The challenges of time and distance

The busyness of school life was frequently mentioned as a barrier to connecting with other schools. For example Taree Christian College explained that while "[w]e loved our little network of Schools....Schools are busy places and that played a part of how often and deeply we connected. (Project report, Taree Christian College). To some degree this limited the effectiveness of the model.

The biggest difficulty has been finding communal times between the schools as we have all been very busy with other aspects of being a school (Project report, Casino Christian School).

The Hub colleagues are very passionate, however I feel we are all so busy that we haven't have enough time to get to know each other as people and individuals and what drives our passion for improving Indigenous outcomes. I feel the time provided hasn't been sufficient enough (Project report, The Scots College).

A further challenge for the non-Sydney based schools was the geographical distance between their campuses.

The biggest challenge we have experienced as a network has been the geographical distance that exists between the schools and being able to align and organise times where staff from each school are able to meet (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

8.2.2 Funding-related issues in the network model

In addition to schools each receiving project funding, a portion of project funds was distributed to each of the four hub schools to resource activities within their network, such as attending meetings, visiting each other's schools and organising professional learning opportunities. Decision making about how best to use this funding was described as challenging by some of the hub schools.

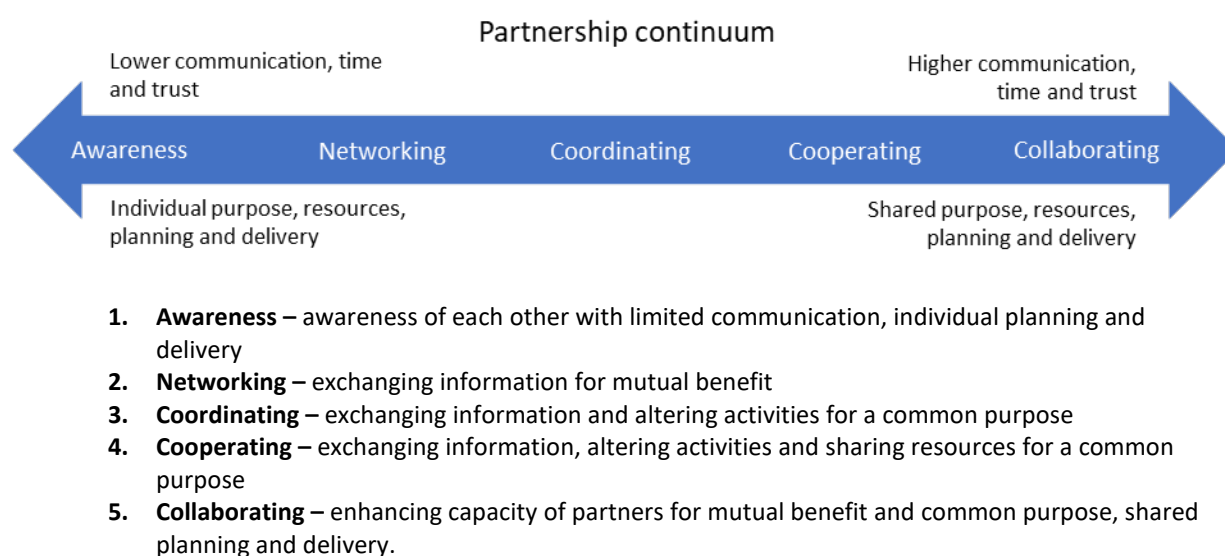
Combined money to use is challenging when the needs are so different. To be fair to all schools, dividing the Hub money needs to occur anyway although this has been hard to manage when some schools believe their school requires more (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

Ideally, we would like to be able to provide further funding to our spoke schools to expedite the implementation of certain strategies that are viewed as essential but have taken some time to implement or gain approval due to reasonable and rational funding constraints. The employment of a staff member or of tutors/mentors is an example of this (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

8.3 Partnership development amongst hub and spoke schools

The analysis above indicates that while there are some challenges, participating schools were satisfied with and benefited from the hub and spoke network model. Another dimension of the external evaluation was to explore more deeply the nature of the partnerships within the model, and whether they may be shifting over time. To investigate this the schools were provided with the partnership continuum below (Box 3) and asked to indicate their partnership status at three key project time points: project commencement (June 2019), the interim stage of the project (November 2019), and the project end date (24 March 2020).

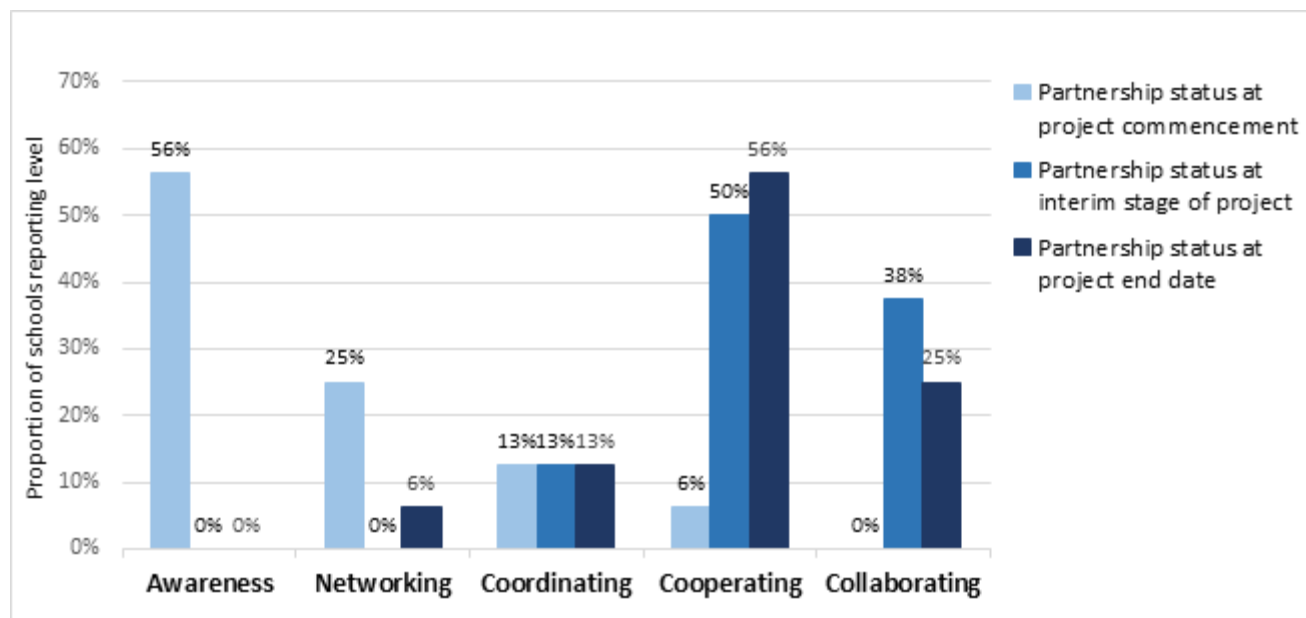
Box 3. Partnership continuum



School responses indicated a clear shift along the partnership continuum towards deeper collaboration over the course of the project, which is captured in Figure 39 below. At project commencement, 56 per cent of schools (n=9) indicated they were at the 'Awareness' stage and 25 per cent (n=4) at the 'Networking' stage. At the interim stage of the project in November 2019, 50 per cent of schools (n=8) indicated they were 'Cooperating' and 38 per cent (n=6) were 'Collaborating'. This affirms schools' written feedback that throughout project implementation there has been a strengthening of relationships, deepening of trust, provision of mutual support and constructive sharing of resources, strategies, and ideas in their network groups. A slight backwards shift along the partnership continuum was observed in partnership status within the school network

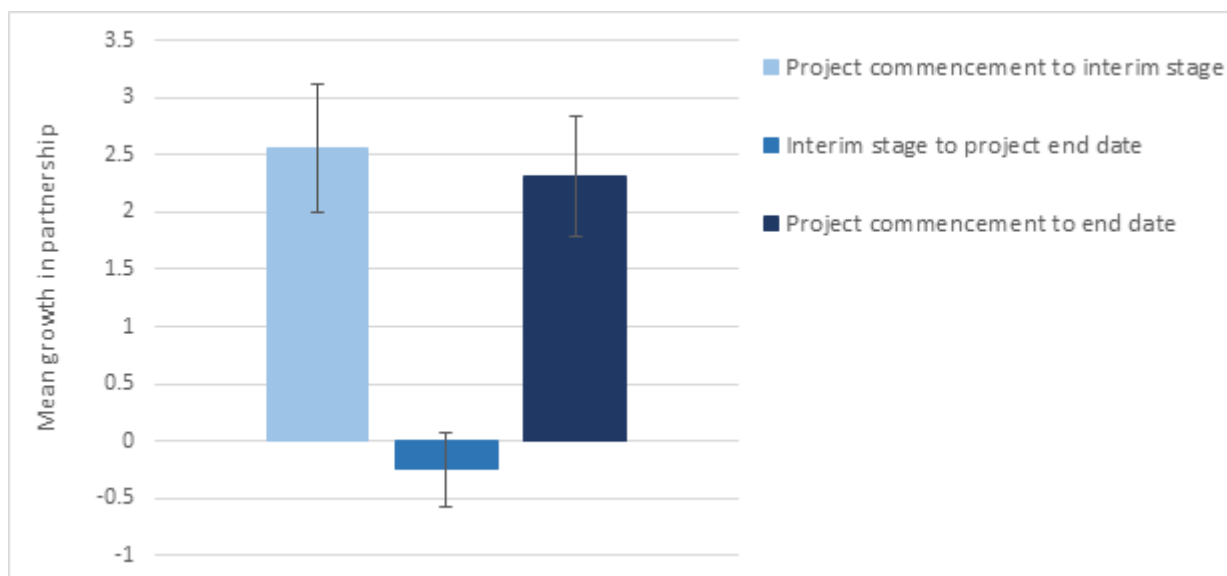
at the project end date of 24 March 2020, with a 13 per cent decrease in the proportion of schools reporting relationships described as 'Collaborating' (25%, n=4).

Figure 39. Shift in partnership status within school network from project commencement, to the interim stage, and to the end date of the project.



The observation of this backwards movement in partnership status from the interim stage of the project to the project end date was further reinforced by analysis of partnership growth between key project time points. Growth was calculated by determining the relative size of shifts along the partnership continuum reported by schools, assuming that each level along the continuum was allocated an equally distributed series of scores from 1 for 'Awareness' through to 5 for 'Collaborating'. For example, a reported shift from 'Awareness' to 'Cooperating' resulted in a partnership growth value of 3, while a shift from 'Collaborating' to 'Coordinating' resulted in a growth value of -2. Mean growth in partnership status is shown in Figure 40. Mean growth was strongly positive from project commencement to the interim stage (2.56 ± 0.56 , 95% CI 2.00 to 3.12), and then slightly negative from the interim stage to the project end date (-0.25 ± 0.33 , 95% CI -0.58 to 0.08). Despite the challenges faced by school networks in early 2020, the overall mean partnership growth from project commencement to end date was strongly positive (2.31 ± 0.53 , 95% CI 1.78 to 2.84).

Figure 40. Mean growth in partnership status within school networks from project commencement to the interim stage, from the interim stage to the project end date, and overall mean growth from project commencement to the project end date.



Several project teams shared their reflections regarding the benefits of the hub and spoke network model despite the confronting circumstances that schools experienced towards the end of the project.

The experience was highly beneficial however once all schools were thrown into the challenges of COVID-19 the model was not as sustainable due to challenges of meeting in person and general busyness. However, up until March 24th the model was highly beneficial for exchanging ideas and sharing resources (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

The summer break and the awareness of the coming COVID-19 events slowed the collaboration that was a hallmark of our hub and spoke model. The Hub and Spoke Model provided for me the best structure to a school collaboration model that I have ever worked with. I cannot express it clearly enough. It is my belief that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at each of our schools have benefited from their schools being involved in this program and particularly the collaboration between our schools (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

It has been difficult this year to maintain the close collaborative working relationship we shared with our other network schools in 2019. We had only connected once in February, when the school year was really just settling down, before COVID hit and schools starting heading into lockdown. This is no-one's fault, but has meant we are now not nearly as close as we were in 2019. However, as an effective framework for cross school collaboration, I would firmly recommend it going into further project phases (Project report, Shore).

This feedback further demonstrates the strength of this model in providing support to schools in their project implementation and its durability under challenging circumstances.

9. Discussion

As outlined in the preceding chapters, the project schools initiated a vast amount and range of activities and strategies that contributed to improving the academic and other outcomes of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Phase 2. Drawing further on the schools' project reports and interview evidence, this section considers the key factors that enabled the schools to successfully implement project strategies and activities, and those factors that constrained progress. It provides key learnings from the pilot project and based on these proposes associated recommendations and concludes with reflections upon sustainability of project activities and possible future directions.

9.1 Enablers of project progress

Enablers were identified both within the school environment and the wider context for the project. Key enablers of progress were:

- Indigenous staff in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous specific positions across the school
- whole-school collaboration and responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education and wellbeing
- additional funding received through project participation
- having a defined school project focusing on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes
- increased collection and use of student data to inform targeted learning support
- school leadership overtly committed to the project
- staff professional learning
- the hub and spoke school network model.

These enablers are analysed further below.

9.1.1 Indigenous staff

A common, and critical, enabler of progress was the role played by schools' Indigenous staff, with most schools referencing the necessity of employing Indigenous staff to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Phase 2. The key role of Indigenous staff in project activities is referred to throughout the above chapters but it is important to further consider the enabling role these staff play.

Some schools already had Indigenous staff before project commencement and used the additional funding to either increase their hours of employment (with examples provided of staff moving from part-time to full-time positions) or to employ new Indigenous staff. Others used the funding to employ Indigenous staff for the first time. Indigenous staff were employed in Indigenous-specific positions, including as cultural mentors, program coordinators, program leads and academic staff, as well as in non-Indigenous specific positions, with examples from project schools including as Head of Department, Head of Boarding, classroom teacher, gardening, maintenance and boarding house staff.

Indigenous staff were described as instrumental in supporting all student-specific project outcomes, as well as in developing family and community relationships, progressing staff's cultural awareness and capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy, and achieving whole school change in valuing and integrating Indigenous knowledge into the school culture and school life. Schools provided

numerous examples of the overall positive impact of their Indigenous staff, for example one school reporting that “[e]mploying an Indigenous staff member....is proving a huge success” (Project report, Canberra Grammar School) and another school that “the greatest achievement so far has been the employment of our Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer” (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School):

Quite simply at Macquarie the project has allowed/empowered us to employ an Aboriginal Engagement Mentor who role is now so central to the school that they will become a permanent member of the staff (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

Key aspects of Indigenous staff members’ roles are described further below as well as some of the complexities of these roles and the challenges experienced by Indigenous staff in the project schools

Cultural mentoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Cultural mentoring was discussed earlier in relation to progressing Outcome 4 (*Students have strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage*, see 5.3.1.ii). The following description typifies project schools’ comments regarding the importance of the cultural mentoring role and its importance in supporting students:

The First Nations Cultural Mentor has been crucial to the success of the project, by helping to grow the students’ sense of cultural belonging at Riverview. The Cultural Mentor has designated boys’ particular cultural roles when entering the College, particularly around ceremony (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview).

Providing academic support

Indigenous student support staff roles extended beyond cultural mentoring to students to providing them with academic support, including through one-to-one learning support, building motivation and engagement and assisting with developing Personalised Learning Plans. One school explained that their Indigenous student support person is “the daily check-in and works really well with the students, both supporting them academically in a day-to-day fashion, but also looking at their cultural competence and giving them opportunities to work with other people that he knows to increase their cultural confidence and knowledge” (Interviewee 2).

An anecdotal piece of data to support this has to do with one of our Year 12 students who was close to being awarded out of the HSC when the AEEO was employed. He has completed his HSC, gave the Acknowledgement of Country at the graduation assembly and dinner and commences a university course in 2020. The role of our Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer in the development of PLPs and new enrolment interviews has been a fantastic by-product of this project (Project report, Macquarie Anglican Grammar School).

Another project staff person described the academic and wellbeing role played their Indigenous Student Learning Support Officer, who is a local Indigenous man employed full-time.

Well, we find what's working really well is X is in lots of their classrooms, especially the kids who are struggling. So if we know that there's issues at home or we're seeing they're not coping with certain classwork, he will be in there working with those kids. And then in the mornings, we have a check-in with the kids so they all go down and play basketball with X and it's a check-in to see how they're going (Interviewee 15).

Facilitating school-family/community relationships

Many schools described their school's Indigenous support staff person as central to building relationships with family and community and identifying and managing issues. The following examples were provided by two non-Indigenous staff members.

Going into communities, that contact point and getting to know families. At times, it was difficult for me to step in to these communities as a white woman. I didn't feel like it was my place so that I didn't feel like I belonged. But it was X's guidance and his kind of mentorship....there was a level of anxiety for me but having X there (helped) (Interviewee 8).

The Cultural Mentor supports staff to have a better cultural understanding, is proactive in sorting out any issues that arise for the students and is a great role model. The ISC [Indigenous Student Coordinator, in this case a non-Indigenous staff person] commented that the Mentor "helps solve issues I don't even know exist" (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

Supporting and developing non-Indigenous staff's cultural awareness

Indigenous staff played a major role in providing non-Indigenous staff with insights into relationships and advice regarding their communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families. For example, one Indigenous staff person explained the advice she provided to staff around contacting students' families:

When the staff say 'oh I've tried to ring Mum, you know she's not ringing back', [I ask] so how many times have you tried?, 'oh I've tried twice', 'okay, try again four-five times, you know she might not have credit or the granddaughter's deleted the number off the phone and she doesn't know who's calling'. So there's just a lot of situational things that take time I suppose (Interviewee 3).

Another Indigenous staff person who is a teacher and Head of Indigenous education described his awareness of the importance of his role in staff development:

I definitely think that through the project in talking with other schools, and also my own experience continuing at school, is the importance of staff training....my role as an educator in staff training like that comes up time and time again. And I've had a few incidents lately, where a teacher has got it wrong. And that's because they haven't possibly received adequate training. And it's created a huge issue because of a lack of understanding of some issues...And so for me, it shows me that I really need to prioritise that as part of my role. That's what I need to do. Like I, I do lots of things in supporting kids all the time, but I really, really need to support staff (Interviewee 1).

Indigenous staff in non-Indigenous specific roles

As noted above Indigenous staff were employed in a variety of roles in the schools, including in non-Indigenous specific roles. One Indigenous staff person noted the importance of not collapsing Indigenous staff's identities with their Indigeneity, or assuming their role to be Indigenous-specific:

We're trying to normalise it aren't we? You know, like we have Aboriginal people that work at the school. But they're not Aboriginal people, they're teachers. Like I'm Aboriginal, but my Aboriginality doesn't define me. I'm Aboriginal, but I'm not an Aboriginal teacher. I'm a

teacher. You know, X is not an Aboriginal Head of House. She's a Head of House (Interviewee 1).

Complexities and challenges experienced by Indigenous student support staff in the school environment

Several challenges and complexities were described by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in schools in relation to the roles of Indigenous staff in their schools. Indigenous staff described the difficulties of managing school and community expectations, feeling pressured to act as representatives either for school or community views and the difficulties they experienced when those views did not align. One Indigenous staff person described his role as providing “cultural brokerage” and described the personal and professional challenges this entailed, including doing his best for the students while managing parental expectations and functioning within the constraints of a conservative school culture (Interviewee 4). Other examples provided by Indigenous staff included acting as negotiators between the school and local communities over art works, murals and signs in language around the school.

Indigeneity of Indigenous student support staff

While there appeared to be a common view across the project schools regarding the importance of employing Indigenous staff, a number of issues were raised by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff regarding practising caution and not assuming that it was always necessarily the best option for supporting Indigenous students. It was suggested that other factors need to be taken into consideration including the support person’s capacity for the job, and a number of schools suggested that it may be preferable to employ a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff while working towards the ideal situation of employing all Indigenous staff in Indigenous-specific roles. One Indigenous staff person provided the following explanation:

Box 4. Indigeneity of Indigenous student support staff

....there is no doubt that having Indigenous people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a school environment definitely increases the cultural capital within the school. I think it's an important aspect and an essential thing to move towards. Because people ask me that question all the time. All the time. I get asked ‘do you think your Indigenous Students Coordinator (or whatever the role title is) do they need to be Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander?’ And my answer is ideally they would be. However, there may not be a huge amount of people to be able to fill those roles. So I think working towards that is important. That might be having a non-Indigenous person in that role because they have certain skills, and that might be around organisation, institutional knowledge, whatever. And then, to complement that person, you might have an Aboriginal education worker, or a teacher's aide that you're training who is Indigenous as well and they have certain skills and knowledges that the non-Aboriginal person hasn't. And that is a really powerful relationship because they both have unique skills. And when that relationship is built on trust and understanding that we are in this equally, because there are certain short failings in both of their skill sets, that two-way process can be seriously powerful for both of them (Interviewee 1).

A non-Indigenous staff person explained the challenges of the Indigenous student support role school, including understanding students' needs and undertaking the communication role, explaining that "it takes a certain special human to be able to lead this program" and that in the interests of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students employing more Indigenous staff members "has to be carefully, carefully done. Because you don't want to set them up for something that they're not...." (Interviewee 8).

The aspects of Indigenous staff roles discussed above indicate some of the wide ranging and complex skills and knowledge these roles entail, including high levels of cross-cultural understanding and communication skills, and the critical roles these staff are playing in the project schools. They also indicate the challenges experienced by Indigenous staff in some instances in meeting the needs and expectations of students, families, community and school. The issues are complex, and more investigation is required to understand them more deeply. The situation suggests there is perhaps scope for greater support and professional development opportunities for Indigenous staff working in the independent school sector.

9.1.2 Whole school collaboration and responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education and wellbeing

Many schools described a key enabler was extending the involvement in and responsibility for the project beyond project staff, or Indigenous student support staff, to the wider school staff and community. For example, one project staff person explained that a big gain through the project was:

....looking at the kind of people who were both motivated to be part of the programme but also had that skill set to really provide support to the students. What we've created is a kind of multi layered approach of support that underpins the students while they're here at school (Interviewee 2).

Another school explained that they are "pulling resources and manpower, brainpower together to teach students, to connect in different ways" (Interviewee 10). One project staff person described the process of assembling a balanced team and how this contributed to achieving results:

I think the number of people willing to get involved in the project has helped. If I did it on my own, you'd be getting rubbish. Just because I'm so time pressed. But I've got two teachers, and it's been a primary focus....But I didn't want to make the project too big either, I wanted it to be achievable and successful. And so I've got two teachers that are super passionate. I've got X [Indigenous Coordinator] that loves his community and ours, the glue in the middle. And then X, who came on probably because she wanted some work [but] is now an advocate for helping Indigenous kids, the amount of work she's putting in outside of those hours as well, huge (Interviewee 16).

Another school described the benefits of bringing together staff with different perspectives and knowledge:

I've done a lot more working with teachers, with leaders and with boarding staff and even like, co-curricular staff, the healthcare staff, it's really important in terms of getting knowledge from everyone in terms of a big picture. Everyone's sort of a holder of a little piece of information and sometimes we jump to assumptions on bits and pieces. We're

really just needing to take the time to really work out what's going on and to sort of work out, you know, ways to improve things (Interviewee 7).

The impact of whole-school collaboration and responsibility is described in detail by one hub school in Box 5.

Box 5. Impact of whole-school collaboration for Indigenous education

Through Phase 1, as well as the first six months of Phase 2 of the project, communication between the College and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities has been facilitated and conducted specifically by the staff of the Indigenous Program....As the culture of the College has positively shifted and cultural awareness has enhanced, the project has encouraged and facilitated positive and close relationships between *all* College staff and the families of the students of the Indigenous Program. Staff feel informed and confident in their knowledge of cultural safety and cultural responsiveness due to activities such as the *Indigenous Culture in Curriculum Week*. As a result, all College staff now join the staff of the Indigenous Program in working in partnership with families and communities for the benefit of the students. Relationships have been developed as Project staff encourage classroom teachers to initiate communication with Indigenous families such as phone calls and Zoom meetings. Project staff also encourage and support families of students to attend Parent Student Teacher Interviews as an integral aspect of the Indigenous Program commitment, in order to ensure that families and communities are engaged in the partnership of the student's academic progress and success (Project report, Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill).

9.1.3 Additional project funding

Through the project all schools received funding to support their project implementation, and hub schools received additional funding to resource their organisational role, including organising network meetings and visiting each other's schools. The project funding was mostly reported by schools as an enabler of their capacity to resource project activities, with smaller project schools particularly reporting that it made a great difference. The funding was used for employing staff and resourcing project activities across the project outcomes as described in the preceding chapters.

A small number of schools described the funding as providing the impetus to initiate activities that had been previously considered but not acted upon in relation to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. An example of this was provided by one school in relation to employing an Aboriginal mentor:

The employment of the Aboriginal mentor wouldn't have happened without [the project]... Every year you have a series of things you dream of putting in your budget, and then somewhere along the way that that list shortens and every year I think an Aboriginal mentor starts on the list, but it tends to slip off....whereas now, whatever happens moving forward, there is a staff member who is the Aboriginal mentor. And we will find a way to fund that....we now have something that we know works that our young, Indigenous kids really value and that we as a school really value so it will be funded from now (Interviewee 17).

It should be noted that in some schools the utilisation of project funding was interrupted by COVID-19, and funding was diverted to other ways support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (for example resources and programs to support students learning from home). These factors will be considered in a separate follow-up report to this one as it falls outside the formal evaluation period set at 24 March 2020.

9.1.4 A defined school project

Related to the point above regarding the impact of project funding, is that having a defined project was in itself a major enabler for initiating and implementing activities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One project staff person explained that:

I think, first of all, just forcing us to focus on this, just by being part of the project, committing to it, and then setting our gaze on it has been a powerful enabler for me (Interviewee 11).

A defined school project in combination with the additional funding raised staff awareness while providing the resources to implement activities.

But we're a small school with very few resources and so in terms of what consumes my time, [the project] is actually really quite significant. The other thing to say is the fact that there is a project means that it's keeping it on everybody's agenda. It's just, it's just on our radar because there's a project there....Getting funding to employ an Aboriginal Education Officer two days per week....they are the driver behind the activities that we're doing....it means that we've got somebody who is driving the agenda. And so that's happening now and it's on everybody's mind (Interviewee 6).

Having a defined project gave staff leverage to advocate for the project and implement activities.

It enabled us to say [to the school Executive] "you pushed us to do this, to put forward a proposal. You've got to be on board with us. Otherwise, you're not staying true to what you said you wanted to happen" (Interviewee 9).

9.1.5 Increased collection and use of student data to inform targeted learning support

Schools demonstrated that over the course of the project their capacity to identify data sources and use data to evaluate their project activities increased. Schools were supported in this through the participatory evaluation approach. This included specific professional learning sessions during project school workshops regarding evaluation methods and tools for gathering qualitative and quantitative data and using data to learn about and demonstrate students' progress. The evaluation methods and tools used by schools are summarised in Section 2.5.2 of this report. School feedback indicated that they made better use of the student data they had already been collecting, as well as introducing new methods and tools. The following observation provides an example of the contribution of data to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes:

We have invested a lot of our time into data collection and analysis. This has allowed us to specifically target key students. The information that we have gathered and will continue to gather will provide us with data that can be tracked for years to come. As each year passes and we continue using the same assessment tools, we will be essentially able to track the

progress of one student all the way through primary. It will assist us as we transition the primary students into [high school] (Project report, Taree Christian College).

9.1.6 School leadership overtly committed to the project

While engaging school leadership is an identified outcome in the Waratah Outcomes Framework (Outcome 9, see 7.2), strong and committed senior leadership was also identified as a critical enabler in achieving change in all project schools. School leaders' awareness and advocacy for the project, and their trust in project leaders to make good decisions, were continually referred to as instrumental to achieving progress throughout the project. In some cases, school leaders were themselves actively engaged in the project; in others they conveyed their support and empowered other staff to implement project activities.

Through the project, we've realised that for real change to occur, more than just the Indigenous student co-ordinators needs to be involved. More often, schools are involving members of their senior leadership and executive in hub/spoke meetings and events (Project report, Pymble Ladies' College).

I think the College trusts me to try and make the best decisions. And I think they're okay with me doing things. So I haven't really been told no, I can't. They're quite happy with the journey that we're on. So I think that probably another enabler is the leadership team (Interviewee 3).

9.1.7 Staff professional learning

The enabling impact of staff professional learning is described in detail in section 7.1 of this report, with some project staff describing their professional learning through the project as the most impactful they had experienced. This included formal professional learning provided by external bodies, customised professional learning delivered at school by external facilitators, and peer-to-peer learning within the school environment, particularly from Indigenous colleagues. Staff reported that professional learning had increased their awareness of Indigenous culture, cultural competency and confidence. This was contributing to increasing staff capacity to build strong relationships with, and implement culturally responsive practices for, their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Staff professional learning had also contributed to staff capacity to integrate Indigenous culture and perspectives in the curriculum and school life.

9.1.8 Hub and spoke network model

The effectiveness of the hub and spoke model in enabling schools to achieved improved outcomes for students is fully outlined in Chapter 8 of this report, including the guidance and direction provided by hub schools to spoke schools, and as a mechanism for sharing and generating ideas and resources, and supporting the design and implementation of schools' projects.

9.2 Constraints

Schools identified several factors which constrained their capacity for achieving their project outcomes. These were:

- time pressures
- staff coordination
- funding
- accessing and using data to demonstrate progress
- staff turnover.

These are described in more detail below.

9.2.1 Time pressures

Pressures associated with time were the most frequently identified challenges by project schools. One school noted that “[i]t takes a great amount of time, energy and coordination to develop and implement a project of this scale” (Project report, Saint Ignatius’ College, Riverview) and another described the pressures of:

Balancing the priorities identified as part of the project while working on other school goals. Time is always the challenge as schools are very busy places with many competing priorities (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

Time pressures related to the overall length of the project, time to implement project strategies, and to fulfil other project responsibilities including reporting and meeting attendance.

A key major challenge is the lack of time. It is difficult incorporating explicit focus and strategies into the whole school context when there are so many other competing demands for the project team members. Avoiding a tokenistic and remedial approach is also important; for changes to become embedded and ongoing there needs to be a whole-school commitment and ownership, which can be difficult to implement in the short time frame provided by the scope of the grant (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

The time commitment to the AIS Project, meetings and particularly reporting is something we have grappled with and need to review. The demands on staff time to meet the commitments of the AIS Partnership Project, implementing strategies and activities, attending meetings and in particular the reporting, is something that we have found challenging. Moving forward, we will likely review the management of staff time within the project in order to ensure that staff commitments at the College and to the students are not significantly impacted by demands on these staff to attend meetings, travel to network schools and complete reporting (Project report, Saint Joseph’s College).

While the project has been a tremendous opportunity for reflection and growth it has also created issues on human resources. This has had an indirect impact on classes taught by the staff involved by managing commitments and travel (Project report, Kinross Wolaroi School).

Commencing the project mid-year also created difficulties for schools, including maintaining momentum, employment decisions and arrangements and program continuity.

I think one challenge is just getting momentum. And because the project starting a little bit later in the year and going past the Christmas holidays where it stops in the New Year and starts back up again. I found that was probably a bit of a challenge because you just get all the momentum and then you know, staff change and new kids come in and all that sort of stuff. Yeah. Yes, so probably time would be one of the main challenges (Interviewee 15).

Time pressures experienced by staff also created tensions in achieving and demonstrating impact and establishing meaningful relationships, leading in some cases to interactions and experiences that compromised genuine long-term engagement. One Indigenous project staff person commented that:

I know, we're sort of stuck with this project and sort of bound by timelines and limits, but it's sort of for me, you can sort of brush through things. But then people think that you're gammin' you know, like you're not genuine and it's not going to be sustainable. And so you more or less are, like people will distrust you and they won't be able to find that connection because it is such a rushed process. And yeah, just the opportunity to sit quietly after you've had a yarn with somebody where, you know, non-Indigenous mob they just now talk talk, but after you've had a cup of tea with a parent or you know, on the phone might be some silence (Interviewee 3).

Time constraints were exacerbated by the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, further reducing the implementation period available to schools and disrupting or curtailing planned project activities.

9.2.2 Staff coordination

While a key enabler of change was involving staff across the school in the project, coordinating this was also identified as a challenge.

I think one of the issues is X is a very big school. So there are a lot of moving parts. So every kid has, you know, a Head of House, has all their teachers. We have counsellors, we have nurses, the boarding staff, there's me, there's the Heads of school, there's the Deputy Heads, you know, there's all these moving parts. And just to get everybody who's involved in looking after a particular kid on the same page, learning support is basically impossible. So, we're not all singing from the same songbook. That can be an issue (Interviewee 13).

A major hindrance and roadblock is coordinating the timing of getting people together for meetings and planning actions. Next year we plan to have fortnightly meetings, one of our team members will arrange and coordinate these meetings to keep us on track (Project report, Taree Christian College).

9.2.3 Staff turnover

Staff turnover was mentioned by a small number of schools as negatively impacting upon project implementation. This was usually in the context of schools describing efforts to build relationships with local Indigenous community members and experiencing setbacks when staff integral to this process left the school.

9.2.4 Funding

Funding was described above as an enabler of project activities – however the level of funding available to implement project activities was also described by some schools as a challenge.

Not enough funding to free up time to make as significant a difference as we would like (Project report, Casino Christian College).

Organising release to be able to meet is also a challenge financially (Project report, Taree Christian College).

9.2.5 Accessing and using data to demonstrate progress

While accessing and using student data to demonstrate progress was identified above as an enabler, as with funding it was also identified by some project schools as an area of challenge.

Another key challenge is the potential to show progress/growth in student outcomes (academic in particular) in such a short period of time. The progress at this stage can really only be measured on our changes to processes and programs rather than a shift in student academic outcomes (Project report, Loreto Normanhurst).

Most schools reported utilising specialised literacy and numeracy assessment methods to establish baseline levels, identify areas of student need and measure student progress and growth in literacy and numeracy over time, presenting a promising foundation of evidence of progress towards academic outcomes for Indigenous students across all project schools in the future. The relatively short project time frame compounded by significant impact to some schools due to catastrophic bushfires towards the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020, followed by the unprecedented disruption to all schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant challenges to schools providing repeated measures of specialised literacy and numeracy assessments. Enhanced support for schools to provide data from repeated assessments in future would enable more rigorous investigation and potential evidencing of student achievement over time at both the individual and aggregate school levels.

Other comments related to challenges in collecting data from multiple data sources to ensure a representation of voices and perspectives in the reporting process.

One aspect that has become apparent in the evidence gathering process of progressing towards achieving the main high and medium priority outcomes of the project is the gap in both and lack of feedback from students. There seems to be a lack of data that highlights how specific project activities are improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Moving forward in the project, focus groups with both staff and students will be used as a key strategy to assist in gathering this type of data as well as the collection of data in day to day interactions. We would like to involve and hear a community perspective by being part of focus group to gathering further qualitative data (Project report, Kempsey Adventist School).

These comments and observations suggest the need to continue to provide professional development and support to staff in identifying potential data sources that will enable them to

evidence their progress, and provide methods and tools for addressing any gaps in data early in the process.

9.3 Key learnings and recommendations

As the second stage of this pilot project concludes, there is an opportunity to reflect upon developments and key learnings from Phase 1 through Phase 2 of the pilot project.

A critical finding from Phase 1 was that 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"³⁰.

These learnings informed the co-design of the Waratah Outcomes Framework, which provided a holistic framework to guide Phase 2 schools while also giving them the flexibility to determine their priority areas. Phase 2 schools benefited from Phase 1 schools' advice that, while adopting a long-term holistic perspective, they needed to be targeted and realistic about the areas they could address within project constraints (including resourcing and time constraints). The preceding chapters describe in detail the many successes achieved by project schools in improving outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. While continuing the focus upon improving students' academic outcomes, Phase 2 schools prioritised and demonstrated progress in strengthening pride in students' Indigenous culture and heritage, once again benefiting from Phase 1 learnings and also wider research that 'cultivating a positive cultural identity is likely to promote a range of outcomes including academic achievement, motivation, and engagement'³¹. Phase 2 schools also focused on supporting student transition into the school, building strong and culturally informed relationships between school, family and community and strengthening whole-of-school valuing and integration of Indigenous culture into school life.

The key enablers of progress in Phase 2 aligned closely with those identified in Phase 1, with the evaluation providing more extensive evidence of the important role of these enablers and the ways in which they facilitated project implementation and change, particularly the critical role of Indigenous staff as well as the need for whole-of-school responsibility for and engagement in Indigenous education. The evaluation findings also demonstrated continuity across the two project phases in constraints upon implementation created through the challenges of time pressures, staff coordination, staff turnover, limited funding, using student data effectively and staff turnover. These are likely to continue to present challenges into the future and knowing about these beforehand can potentially support schools in developing mitigation strategies. These findings can also inform decision making by project funders regarding setting realistic project time frames and levels of resourcing.

³⁰ Craven et al (2016), p.37.

³¹ Mooney et al (2016), p.13.

Phase 2 evaluation indicates that there were strong benefits to all project schools from participating in the hub and spoke school network model, with schools reporting enormous gains from this model in terms of shared learning and support and the generation of new and innovative approaches to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes.

This final section consolidates the key learnings from Phase 2 and proposes associated recommendations for future directions. It is based on observations from the External Evaluation Team combined with direct feedback from Phase 2 project staff in school reports and interviews regarding their key learnings and advice they would provide to other schools who wished to undertake activities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes.

Key learning 1. Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy and numeracy outcomes requires targeted and individualised learning support informed by accurate student data

Individualised targeted learning support was fundamental to improving Indigenous students' literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes. Processes to establish, implement and review effective learning support for Indigenous students were underpinned by personalised learning plans and profiles, informed through collaboration and consultation with students, as well as with family members and carers, and a wide range of school staff. A blend of targeted support activities provided by specialist staff both within and outside of class time proved successful for improving Indigenous students' academic outcomes. Throughout Phase 2, significant positive growth was observed in literacy for Indigenous students overall and for Indigenous boys, and in numeracy for Indigenous girls. Schools recognised the benefits of improved systems to collect, analyse, and utilise data to inform learning support program development and implementation, and findings indicate that this is an area of practice deserving of further investment and support in future.

Recommendation 1

Schools should continue to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with individualised and targeted academic support, which is informed by timely and accurate student data in addition to consultation with students and families.

Key learning 2. Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic outcomes occurs most effectively within a holistic understanding of and responsiveness to students' capabilities and needs

Phase 2 consolidated Phase 1 learnings and wider research that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's learning is best supported through a holistic model that recognises the complex interconnectedness of their academic, social, spiritual, emotional, physical, and cultural wellbeing. The 10 outcomes within the Waratah Outcomes Framework provided guidance to schools in adopting a holistic understanding of students' development, while also supporting schools in targeting specific areas, and evidencing the effectiveness of their project strategies and activities.

Recommendation 2

Schools should adopt a holistic model for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes that recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of students' academic, social, spiritual, emotional, physical, and cultural development.

Key learning 3. Indigenous staff are a critical component for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes

Indigenous staff in both Indigenous-specific and non-specific roles were instrumental in achieving progress towards all project outcomes. However, while ideally Indigenous-specific roles would be occupied by Indigenous staff, this may not always be possible, and the most important factor is ensuring that Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff work together to provide the best possible quality of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It must also be acknowledged that Indigenous staff experience unique challenges including their “cultural brokerage” role and these challenges need to be understood more deeply so that adequate professional support and development is provided.

Recommendation 3

Schools should prioritise employing Indigenous staff in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous specific positions, and schools and the independent sector should work together to identify and understand the challenges experienced by Indigenous staff and ways to support them in their school roles.

Key learning 4. Strengthened relationships are the foundation for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes

Most project schools in Phase 2 prioritised building strengthened, culturally informed relationships, between school, family, and community as well as between staff and students. Phase 2 schools benefited from the guidance provided by Phase 1 hub schools that strengthened relationships provide the foundation for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes and benefited from learning about how Phase 1 schools went about doing this. Collectively project schools' demonstrated that strengthened relationships with family and community contributed to stronger communication and collaboration around student support, greater trust and cultural understanding between students' families and schools, improved student transition into the school, and strengthened students' pride in their Indigenous culture and heritage. Activities to strengthen relationships between staff and students were leading to deeper trust and cultural understanding, contributing further to increased student pride in their Indigenous heritage and overall sense of wellbeing.

Recommendation 4

Schools should devote time and long-term commitment to nurturing culturally informed relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' families and communities, and between these students and staff. This should be a priority from the outset of any program or activities to improve these students' academic and other outcomes.

Key learning 5. Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires whole-school commitment, collaboration, and action

Phase 2 schools consistently identified that achieving change and improving outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires the commitment of the whole school community. It requires all staff to take responsibility and collaborate, with many examples given of the benefits of harnessing multiple perspectives, skills, and knowledge across the school to strengthen the support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This includes school leaders, teaching staff, specialist staff, professional staff, and the wider community of students and families collaborating.

Recommendation 5

Schools should be encouraged in extending responsibility for improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to the whole school community and fostering active engagement of the community.

Key learning 6. The school network model is effective in supporting progress

Schools demonstrated the significant benefits they derived from the school network model, particularly the opportunities it provided for them to support and learn from each other regarding what enables progress, what constrains it, and how to deal with the challenges. The high level of satisfaction reported by schools with the network model, along with the evidence that it is contributing to schools' capacity to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, suggest this model be investigated further for its potential to provide opportunities for future consolidation and scaling up of project activities.

Recommendation 6

The school network model should continue to be offered to schools in future projects and associated activities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes. This includes school networks within the independent school sector and with public and Catholic school sectors.

Key learning 7. The participatory evaluation model used in this project was effective in building schools' capacity for self-evaluation of their strategies and activities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes

The participatory evaluation approach increased project staff awareness of and capacity to identify a wider range of qualitative and quantitative data sources that they could draw upon to understand their students' progress across the different project outcomes. It also contributed to developing their capacity to analyse and use their student data. It is suggested that staff would benefit from continuing to build skills in data collection and analysis, which could occur through the network model approach as well as supporting schools to access other forms of professional learning in this area.

Recommendation 7

Schools would benefit from and should be provided with opportunities for ongoing professional learning about education evaluation, including identifying student data sources, developing measures of progress, and analysing qualitative and quantitative student data.

Key learning 8. Schools' capacity to achieve project outcomes benefited from having a defined project with specific and measurable outcomes

Having a defined project contributed to schools achieving outcomes by raising staff awareness and fostering commitment across the school to Indigenous education – keeping it on people's radar. It also provided a structured approach for the design, implementation, monitoring and reporting of project activities with key features of a successful project approach noted by school staff being to start small, have clear intended outcomes, and focus resources strategically.

Recommendation 8

Schools should be encouraged to and supported in utilising a project model approach for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic and other outcomes.

Key learning 9. Schools experienced common challenges in relation to time pressures, resourcing, funding, staff coordination and effective use of student data

The challenges experienced by Phase 2 schools in implementing and identifying the impact of their project activities are likely to continue, and to also be experienced by other schools. Knowing about these challenges before undertaking new activities and receiving ongoing support would increase the opportunities for schools to develop ways of managing them and mitigating the risk they pose to achieving project outcomes. In this respect the network model provided an effective support framework for schools to share their experiences, and support and learn from each other regarding how to manage challenges.

Recommendation 9

Mechanisms should be provided for supporting schools to identify and manage challenges associated with implementing Indigenous education projects before and during project implementation. This could include support to schools in establishing cross-school networks.

Key learning 10. Additional project funding is integral to the ongoing development and implementation of strategies and activities to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes

The additional funding received through the project was integral to schools' capacity to undertake project implementation, especially smaller schools with fewer resources. It provided the impetus to initiate activities and make changes that were proven to be effective for improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Recommendation 10

Schools' capacity to continue to improve outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would benefit from the investment of continued funding directed towards this critical area.

9.4 Concluding comments: sustainability and future directions

When reflecting upon the evaluation evidence a picture emerges across the project schools of a vast amount of activity generated through the project to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The evidence indicates that the strategies, programs, and activities targeting students' academic outcomes, engagement of and relationship building with family and community, and whole-school acknowledgement and integration of Indigenous culture into school life are yielding significant results.

However, while Phase 2 demonstrated progress towards improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, it also highlighted the need for continued and sustained focus upon support for these students across all the outcomes areas identified in the Waratah Outcomes Framework. This situation is reflective of the nationwide context, with the ongoing imperative for continued focus on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'

learning outcomes reflected in the 2020 *National Agreement on Closing the Gap Agreement*³² which includes learning targets and indicators for improving students' reading, writing and numeracy.

Phase 2 strategies and activities were not only effective in achieving improvements in the project time period, they laid the groundwork across the schools to build on into the future so that they can continue their efforts to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes. A key element of this was the commitment, dedication and determination of project and other staff to achieving positive change for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Their growing awareness and insights into providing culturally responsive pedagogy and embedding Indigenous knowledge and culture in curriculum and school life will continue to contribute to improving the opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to succeed.

There is great scope to deepen and extend the beneficial relationships and collaborations initiated through the pilot project. This includes relationships within each of the school communities between school staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families and communities. It also includes the relationships and collaborations developed between the schools through the school network model, with the support of AISNSW. It is suggested that ongoing school resourcing within a school network model would consolidate and build upon the gains to date in existing project schools, as well as providing the knowledge base and infrastructure to extend the project to incorporate other schools.

³² Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments (2020). National Agreement on closing the gap (July 2020). Accessed August 2020, <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-National-Agreement-on-Closing-the-Gap-1.pdf>

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1

School descriptions and project summaries

1. Barker College

Barker College is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 Anglican day and boarding school in Hornsby on Sydney's North Shore. The school was initially a boys' school and has been phasing in co-education since 1975, with preschool-Year 3 and Years 10-12 currently co-educational and from 2020 girls commencing in Year 7. Barker College is undergoing a cultural shift that aspires for a more equitable future; a major aspect of this is the opening of Darkinjung Barker in 2016, and the Indigenous education program commencing at the Hornsby campus in mid-2017, with the appointment of the Indigenous Education Projects Leader. There has been an exponential growth since with the First Nations students and families now seen as an integral part of the community, with the work done in alignment with the school motto '*honor non honores*' (seek honour above rewards).

Barker College's project is named *Wingaru wa Muru-da* ('thinking on the path to the future' in Dharug language), with the project taking a holistic approach to improving educational outcomes by also focusing on pastoral and cultural outcomes, including transition into boarding and understanding of and pride in culture. It includes individual, targeted literacy and numeracy for students in Years 7 - 10, and small group tutoring for boarders and any other Indigenous students in Years 10 - 12 who wish to attend. Complementing this academic support are measures to lift student wellbeing with a targeted focus on boarding and cultural pride. Many of the practical elements of this focus had already begun but the establishment of *Wingaru-wa Muru-da* as a formalised program has allowed the initiatives to grow.

2. Calrossy Anglican School

Calrossy Anglican School is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 day and boarding school which is coeducational in primary school, has single sex classes in Years 7 - 10 and mixed classes in Years 11 and 12. The school is on Kamilaroi/Gomeroi country in Tamworth in Northern NSW. Its setting and embedding in the local Tamworth community shape the distinctive experiences offered to students, who have access to resources in agriculture and primary industry, through regional networks and locally based national companies, as well as a strong academic focus.

Calrossy Anglican School's project aims to establish stronger partnerships and more authentic connections with Indigenous students and their families, as well as the wider Kamilaroi/Gamillaro community. In addition to this, its focus is on improving and extending students' literacy and numeracy skills by providing them with mentors, tutors and where required, implementing support programs specific to individual student needs.

3. Canberra Grammar School

Canberra Grammar School is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 Anglican day and boarding school. The school transitioned from a boys' school to a fully co-educational school in 2018 and now has girls present in every year group with the female population at 42%. The school provides a warm and welcoming environment with significant engagement from the students, strong relationships between staff and students, and well-represented student voice. It has a fluctuating population due

to its location in Canberra with many families connected to the Defence Force and DFAT and international students as boarders or members of embassy families.

Canberra Grammar School offered an Indigenous Boarding Scholarship for the first time in 2019. The project is focused on developing individualised literacy and numeracy support, building Indigenous students' cultural competence and sharing this rich history with the rest of the school population, embedding a support team and developing a close relationship with families from the south coast.

4. Casino Christian School

Casino Christian School is a small, Independent K - Year 12 co-educational Christian day school in North Casino, a regional town located in Northern New South Wales. The school's vision and mission is to see parents, church and school working together to educate students from a Christian perspective, and so equip them to *'live lives that are honoring to Christ'*. The school positions itself as an educational option for families to receive a quality Christian education in a personalised, nurturing environment.

Casino Christian School aims to ensure through the project that its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students understand that they are valued. The project is particularly focusing on improving the literacy and numeracy of students and tracking the data to ensure this is occurring. It is also focusing on strengthening relationships between the school and the Bundjalung community and staff's capacity to relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, and better equipping them to teach about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

5. Casino High School

Casino High School is a comprehensive co-educational public Years 7 - 12 day school located in Northern New South Wales. The school focuses on every student's wellbeing to ensure they are educated in a supportive and nurturing environment, and aims to enhance the development of its students as confident and creative individuals equipping them to become informed citizens and lifelong learners.

Casino High School's project is focusing on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Years 7-9 students, improving staff and student cultural awareness through professional learning within the local community, building leadership skills through the development of a Junior AECG and further strengthening relationships between the school and community.

6. Kempsey Adventist School

Kempsey Adventist School is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 co-educational day school operating within the Adventist Education System. The school is located in Kempsey, a small regional town recognised as a low socio-economic status area. The school aims to provide a nurturing, positive learning environment, creating a sense of belonging. The school provides opportunities for students to develop spiritually, emotionally, physically and academically, creating aspiration for students to live happy and successful lives.

Kempsey Adventist School has continued through the project to focus on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of students with individual and group support. In addition to this the school wide strategy of improving engagement through Project Based Learning continues to be embedded. Deepening relationships and building skills to connect young people in a culturally appropriate manner also continues to be a large focus of the school's project.

7. Kinross Wolaroi School

Kinross Wolaroi School is an Independent Uniting Church Pre K - Year 12 co-educational day and boarding school located in Orange NSW. The school aims to provide a holistic education that focuses on the needs of its regional students in a rapidly changing world and equips them to live meaningful lives and make a positive contribution to society. The school's motto of '*Knowledge Friendship Integrity*' is seen as central to all it does, and underpinning this as a Uniting Church School are five core values of Courage, Respect, Inclusiveness, Resilience and Commitment. The school describes itself as having a tradition of welcoming Indigenous students and their families, and recognising the many ways Indigenous culture contributes to the dynamism of the school and enriches its community.

Kinross Wolaroi School has named its project *Yanhanha bula waa* ('Walking in two worlds') from Wiradjuri language. Its focus is to improve literacy and numeracy, improve students' transition into school and further support and prepare students as they transition out of school. It aims to improve literacy and numeracy through intervention strategies, additional class support and increasing engagement in existing support programs. Transition will be improved through changes to enrolment processes and family engagement in the year before students commence school.

8. Knox Grammar School

Knox Grammar School is an Independent K - Year 12 non-selective day and boarding boys' schools in the Uniting Church tradition, located in Wahroonga on Sydney's North Shore. The school values are wisdom, compassion, integrity, faith and courage. The school's Mentor program is based on Positive Psychology and Total Fitness, focused on the academic, physical social, spiritual and cultural development of each student.

The Knox Indigenous Program commenced in 2008, initially funded by Knox scholarships and in 2012 the school were partnered with AIEF and later with the Go Foundation. The school's project is focused upon improving literacy and numeracy, a positive transition into the school and boarding environment and strengthening relationships between staff and students. These have been chosen as an integrated focus of supporting Indigenous students, culturally, academically and socially with emphasis on the students' well-being and resilience. The project aims to further develop and enhance current practices and initiatives, through detailed, research-based analysis of individual student needs to support growth in academic, cultural and emotional education. It is also developing a long-term strategy to deliver successful transition programs.

9. Loreto Normanhurst

Loreto Normanhurst is an Independent Catholic, Years 5 - 12 day and boarding girls' school located in the Upper North Shore of Sydney. The school's values are felicity, verity, sincerity, justice and freedom, with the school's mission being to grow women of integrity who are independent, articulate and compassionate and who seek justice through faith. The school believes it is imperative that each student feels encouraged to reach her academic potential in an environment of freedom, care and respect for the individual.

Loreto Normanhurst aims to use the project to further develop and refine existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student programs, with particular focus on developing a clearly articulated transition program for students who are often living away from their families and communities for the first time and are prone to higher levels of feeling disconnected and isolated during the

transition process. It intends to plan and implement a strong and explicit wellbeing program that will be integrated into both the boarding and day school to ensure that the school is developing a climate that is more conducive to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students. In addition, the school is committed to providing more targeted literacy and numeracy interventions, and strengthening relationships amongst staff and students.

10. Macquarie Anglican Grammar School

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 co-educational day and boarding school situated in Dubbo. As Australia's newest boarding community focused on serving the families of country NSW, Macquarie draws students from all Western NSW, an area of over 500,000km² with a drawing population of over 200,000 people. Macquarie has developed an educational program that meets the needs of the individuals within its diverse community including professionals, farmers, small and large business people from a range of cultural backgrounds, and a growing number of First Nations people.

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School's project has three main goals: to improve Indigenous students' literacy and numeracy outcomes, develop stronger community links between Macquarie and the Indigenous communities of its drawing area, and to develop the cultural competency of staff. The school is working towards goal 1 through assessing students' literacy and numeracy outcomes and supporting them with programs that meet their individual needs. It is working towards goal 2 through employing an Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer through whom it is maintaining regular engagement with the local AECG, and expanding the teaching of Wiradjuri language from Stage 1 through to Stage 2 and including all of its AECG representatives. It is working towards goal 3 by developing a cultural competency program with its Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer engaging local community programs and leaders to assist in this.

11. Pymble Ladies' College

Pymble Ladies' College is an Independent K - Year 12 girls' day and boarding school located in a high socioeconomic area on Sydney's North Shore, informed by the values and the ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Pymble Ladies' College's project continues from core learnings in Phase 1. The College maintains its commitment to evaluate and improve the transition of students into the school, and improve students' academic achievement, with an aim of increasing levels of sustainability and longevity in initiatives in this area. The numbers of students in the program grew in 2019 and again in 2020 so a sustained approach is increasingly important. A key aspect is engaging College leadership and the College community more intentionally in goals to support excellence in Indigenous education, including whole-of-school integration of Indigenous culture and targeted professional learning opportunities for staff. A stronger strategy around ways that teacher-leaders and designated school leaders make deep and impactful change in Indigenous education is also a focus.

12. Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview

Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview is an Independent Years 5 - 12 day and boarding boys' school, located in Riverview on Sydney's Lower North Shore. Its mission is providing a holistic Catholic education for students, grounded in the Gospel values of justice, service, discernment, conscience and compassion, with the school's approach to education based on the concept of *cura personalis* or 'care for the whole person'. This approach operates from the understanding that students are most

capable of working at their best when they feel supported emotionally, spiritually and academically, with students placed in a House system that provides a structure of integrated pastoral support consisting of the Heads of House, House mentors, and fellow students across year groups.

Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview's project is aimed at supporting the transition of First Nations students from Year 6 into Year 7 and then following them through into Year 8 and Year 9, by supporting the students culturally and academically. Cultural support includes the project's staff members fostering relationships with students' families and communities prior to the students entering the College and throughout their time there, with a full-time First Nations Program Coordinator developing students' and families' cultural connectedness at the College. The academic focus of the project is on improving students' literacy, language and numeracy skills through data-informed, targeted literacy, numeracy and language intervention programs delivered one-on-one or in small groups, and direct in-class support.

13. Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill

Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill is a Year 7 - 12 day and boarding boys' school in the Catholic, Marist Tradition. The school's vision is to educate boys for life, learning and leadership for the common good, and to reaffirm the values and traditions of a supportive, non-selective learning and Catholic faith environment. It aims to commit to excellence through an integrated program of teaching and learning, co-curricular activities and pastoral care that seeks out, tests and affirms the best in each student.

Saint Joseph's College's project continues to focus primarily on improving students' literacy and numeracy and ensuring they achieve their full learning potential through holistic support that enhances the capabilities of low and medium level learners and furthers the scholastic potential of academically gifted students. The project also aims to enhance understanding of cultural sensitivities amongst staff so that students are supported and empowered to achieve academic success in the school's context, within a broader context of educational development that equips students for lifelong learning both within and beyond the College context. The addition of the Spoke and Hub Network Model has added a further direction, dimension and emphasis to the project; primarily one of reflective learning through support and collaboration.

14. Shore

Shore is an Independent K - Year 12 day and boarding Anglican school in North Sydney in NSW, that is co-educational in the primary school and a boys' school in the high school. Its traditional Christian roots remain a strong foundation of daily and overall school culture and it stresses the right for all to participate in an educational environment that is safe and supportive of inclusion, and that there is a combined responsibility to ensure this happens. The school emphasises that all students are individual learners with a diverse range of abilities, strengths, interests and backgrounds, and that personal excellence is accessible to all who aspire to it.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has recently become a focus at Shore. Historically, whilst the school had a small number of boarding scholars, the expectation had been that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would simply 'fit in' to the school's culture. Since the creation of the Director of Inclusion role, the conversation around the need to be more responsive in support of these students has become a priority at an executive level and as a whole school narrative. The school now works hard to be collaborative partners with Yalari, meets regularly with the boys as a group, connects and communicates frequently with families and has appointed a

stipulated staff member within the counselling team whose role is to solely support the school's Indigenous students and their families. Shore is also working hard to increase the number of Indigenous students, throughout the day and boarding contexts.

15. Taree Christian College

Taree Christian College is an Independent K - Year 12 co-educational Christian day school, with students drawn from a wide area including Forster, Pacific Palms, Wingham, Mt George, Old Bar and Nabad. The school's mission is to educate excellently from a Christian perspective, developing and nurturing students' character, faith, knowledge, skills and values in the context of a dynamic, caring and creative Christ-centred community.

Taree Christian College is focusing on its K – Year 6 students through the project, which is ultimately designed to improve Indigenous students' literacy and numeracy outcomes, specifically targeting individual students performing below age/grade expectations and delivering personalised intervention. In the second half of the project the school aims to identify why a number of its Indigenous students struggle to engage with learning, and also improve the overall well-being of students, raise cultural awareness, strengthen relationships with family and community, increase trust and give the community a stronger voice at the College.

16. The Scots College

The Scots College is an Independent Pre K - Year 12 Presbyterian day and boarding boys' school located in Bellevue Hill in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The College aims to build a culture of respect in its community towards God, others, self and environment by aligning policies and practices with Christian principles. It is committed to developing a culture of high expectations that nourishes the development of creative, confident, accomplished young men, with learning experiences increasingly personalised and shaped in response to students' stages of development rather than their age or year level.

The Scots College's project has a clear focus on authentic engagement with Indigenous parents, community and students to provide a voice and enable parents to feel connected to the College and the Indigenous Education Program. The project is focused on improving literacy and numeracy, involving working with all aspects of the College staff following the Inquiry Cycle model and utilising a chain of evidence for shifts in practice and process. There is a focus on pathways and post schooling options for boys in Years 10 – 12.

Appendix 2

School case studies

Strengthened relationships and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Yarn Up at Barker College

Purpose

To strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students and between students and staff and strengthen students' cultural identity and pride in their Indigenous heritage. This was approached by providing students with a designated culturally safe physical space where they could come together to connect and contemplate shared experiences and feel empowered as First Nations people. Yarn Up allows students to form connections and find support outside of their age group, which is important in such a large school, and acts as a forum where students can share their thoughts about life at the school, express concerns and make recommendations to staff.

Target group

All 17 First Nations Students of Barker College are the target group, with 11 students participating in Yarn Up regularly.

Activities

Yarn Up involves regular, weekly lunchtime meetings. Sometimes the Indigenous Education Projects Leader starts with a discussion topic, other times students contribute topics of their own, regularly utilising Yarn Up to talk about current issues in the school and around the world. On special occasions such as Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, students are invited to bring a friend and a teacher of their choice to Yarn Up, and lunch is provided. Cultural activities have included students identifying their Country and pasting photos of themselves on an AIATSIS map hanging in the Yarn Up meeting space.

Outcomes

Students now have strong, cross-year friendships that they can rely on as they navigate life at the school. More students are accessing leadership opportunities such as contributing to the planning and running of major school events for NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week. An unintended, yet positive consequence was that students attending Yarn Up are more confident in identifying as Indigenous and expressing the strength of their identity to non-Indigenous people.

Learnings

We have learned to adjust each Yarn Up session by listening to the needs and feelings of the students in that moment, whether that be a structured activity or discussion, or just providing a space in the middle of a long school day where they can relax. Advice to others would be to create a designated physical space that is welcoming and familiar, a space just for the students that they can come any time to be themselves, charge their phones, take food, and chat to the Indigenous Education staff about their day, wellbeing, schoolwork or family. When we have hosted Yarn Up in other locations, students have been less likely to participate and open up in discussions.

Student C could not identify which Nation he was from at the start of 2019, but after listening to the other students in Yarn Up talk about their Country and cultures, and wanting to add his photo to the map, he encouraged his parents to find out and proudly announced where his Country is during Term 3. (Observation of Indigenous Education Projects Leader)

Student Y "has been speaking to us in detail about her ideas about contribution to support Yarn Up this year... (she) has been researching ways of making this important moment in time, reflective of her maturing sense of self and a recognition of her community." (Student Y's parents, email to Indigenous Education Projects Leader)

"I'm not really worried about what people think, it's good for them to know that because most people when they look at me don't think that, so I definitely think the whole Yarn Up having others there who are the same [identifying as Indigenous] definitely does help and make it easy to say it." (Student Q, Interview re Term 1, 2020)

Improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Calrossy Anglican School

Purpose

To improve academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Calrossy Anglican School through development of better learning practices in organisation, consolidation, and revision of classwork, as well as preparation for assessment tasks and self-identification of learning support required.

Target group

Nine Indigenous boarding students, including one male and eight female students in Years 7 through 12.

Activities

Tutoring was provided in two boarding houses by two former Calrossy Anglican School students, to support current students in undertaking more purposeful study during Prep time. Students met with their tutor for 40 minutes once a week. Most tutoring was provided on a one to one basis, however two students from the same Year group sometimes met with one tutor when working on common subjects or tasks. Learning activities conducted during tutoring included:

- Going through student diaries to ascertain due dates and areas of study requiring support
- Setting up study and assessment completion schedules
- Revision of key learning areas, with a focus on complex processes in Maths and Science, and essay structure and writing in English.

Outcomes

Indigenous students reported feeling more confident in their school work following tutoring, and this was demonstrated through their increased application and engagement in class. Students also reported feeling more organised with their work, and teachers indicated that students were completing tasks on time and to a higher standard. Feedback was positive from both students and parents, as well as teachers, and suggested there had been direct benefits of the tutoring. Positive changes related to tutoring were particularly pronounced for students in Years 7 to 10. Year 11 and 12 students found the relationship with the tutor a bit slower to build and had not experienced the extent of change reported by their younger peers.

Learnings

At Calrossy Anglican School, we have learned that our Aboriginal students thrive when receiving continued support and help to understand the assessment requirements of our school. This format of tutoring worked very well in our context. We would advise working with tutors who are ex-students or current university students. The relationship students had with the tutor was essential to the success of the program, so take time and care to pick the right person for your students.

78% (n=7) of students answered either 'A great deal' or 'A lot' to the question "Did you find tutoring helpful during Prep time?"

"I have found [the tutor] very helpful and I would love to continue this next Term."

(Indigenous student feedback, Term 2 2020)

"I would like to continue using [the tutor] next Term as I felt I was on top of all my work, getting organised for tasks. It was helpful."

(Indigenous student feedback, Term 2 2020)

"[Student name] began the year confidently, engaging enthusiastically in class and willingly volunteering her solutions to demonstrate her developing understanding of the concepts covered."
(Mathematics teacher, feedback on tutored student)

Strengthened connection to and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Canberra Grammar School

Purpose

To increase and strengthen cultural awareness, confidence, and connection to culture in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, through the design and delivery of a cultural immersion program at Canberra Grammar School. This project occurred in response to student-identified need, emerging from 2019 survey results that Indigenous students were craving more time dedicated to learning about and appreciating their culture. The program was also designed to enable students to spend time together to socialise and support each other.

Target group

All fourteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship students at Canberra Grammar School in 2020, including day students and boarders.

Activities

Indigenous students at Canberra Grammar School come from several regions and nations, so it was important to offer a course providing opportunities to appreciate and celebrate Aboriginal culture generally. The program was facilitated by Yurbay, an Indigenous consultancy and cultural services provider. The program consisted of:

- An initial school-based eight-week program offered for two hours after school each week, including traditional Aboriginal plant use for foods, medicines, and fibres, as well as Wiradjuri teaching stories and their connection to culture, kinship structures, and animal teachings.
- Throughout the school-based program, students worked together to design and create a cultural garden space. Students celebrated the garden creation with a bush foods cooking class in the final week.
- The program culminated with an on-Country excursion visiting local area sites, learning how to identify native plants, and exploring connection to Country and culture.

Outcomes

Students developed increased cultural awareness and knowledge and speak about their culture with growing confidence and pride. A 2020 follow-up survey will further investigate the extent to which students feel they have developed strengthened connection to and pride in their Indigenous culture. Program success led to ongoing and related activities, such as teaching Early Learning Centre students about the native garden.

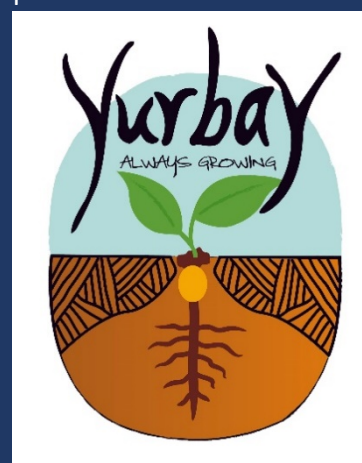
Learnings

The project was an outstanding success and led to other cultural and academic support initiatives across the school. We have learned that these students are amazing ambassadors for their families and their culture, and they have helped shape the community of Canberra Grammar School, for the better.

The Canberra Grammar School native garden project:



Cultural awareness program provider:



Exploring culturally significant sites on Country:



Strengthened connection to and pride in Indigenous culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Mural project at Casino Christian School

Purpose

To strengthen connection to Indigenous culture, and strengthen relationships between school, family and community. Initially the intention was to create a mural on an external wall so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would feel appreciated in the school by representing their culture and histories in a tangible way. However, the focus shifted to building relationships with the community, using the mural as a vehicle to develop those relationships.

Target group

All 29 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the school, with the 18 high school students more involved in the project than the 11 primary school students. The group will decide whether other members of the student body are involved in the project in the future.

Activities

The project commenced with staff attending the *Connecting to Country*³³ program and meeting with a Bundjalung consultant to determine culturally appropriate steps in the mural project. School community stakeholders were consulted regarding imagery, which involved three staff, 29 students and approximately fifteen parents and carers. The next step will be for students to create design proposals, then a prototype of the chosen proposal will be developed and presented to the Elders for their approval. Following this the mural will be painted onto the wall.

Outcomes

Staff have observed that students' feeling of belonging at the school and being connected to their culture has increased. Levels of trust between family and school are increasing. Community members have expressed satisfaction about communication with the school. There has been a greater engagement of school leadership in Indigenous culture and perspectives, and related events and activities.

Learnings

We have learnt that the Bundjalung community have a vested interest in the way that we conduct our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and practices and want to be involved and consulted. The most important component of implementing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program is the relationships that are formed between the school and the community, including with students, parents, carers and Elders. For anybody else implementing a project like this, we would recommend that the school consult heavily with the local Aboriginal Elders early in the process.

64 per cent of high school students have said that their experience as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Person at CCS has become more positive each year they have attended the school.

'This year was better.'
(Student feedback)

'I love to talk to an Aboriginal Officer so I can tell them my life.' (Student feedback)

'It has been helpful having an Aboriginal Education Officer because Aboriginal people are getting more involved in the school.'
(Student feedback)

'I love having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator because I love doing the activities and learning about what the Bundjalung Nation did when they first arrived here in Australia.' (Student feedback)

'That's okay. I am a proud Aboriginal woman. You might not know the black fella ways but I'm going to teach you.' (Family member)

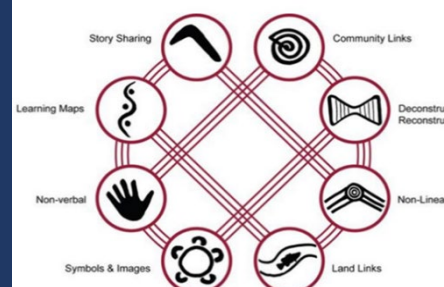
³³ NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (2020). *Connecting to Country*, <https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/policies-and-programs/connecting-to-country/>
2020 AISNSW Pilot Project Phase 2 final report

Staff have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices: 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning at Casino High School

Purpose

To improve staff knowledge, skills and confidence to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices at Casino High School through whole-of-school embedding of the *8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning*³⁴ (8 Ways) pedagogy framework. *8 Ways* encompasses Aboriginal perspectives to improve learning outcomes through eight interconnected pedagogies involving story-based learning, learning maps, hands-on and non-verbal techniques, use of symbols and images, land-based learning, non-linear and synergistic logic, modelling and scaffolding, and community links.

8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning











Target group

All staff and students, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across all Year groups.

Activities

All staff participated in the *8 Ways* 10-hour professional development program, supporting educators in reflecting on their personal cultural orientation to learning, and exploring and implementing the framework to enhance teaching through rather than about culture. During Term 1 2020, Casino High School embedded the *8 Ways* pedagogical framework into every Key Learning Area's scope and sequence to alter the way lessons were delivered to all students. Staff were expected to use the symbols in their programs and incorporate *8 Ways* into each lesson.

PDHPE Faculty program register with 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning embedded across a Year 9 Unit of Learning:

Casino High School PDHPE 2020								
Stage:	4	5	Year:	7	8	9	10	
Strand(s):	Health, Wellbeing and Relationships		Movement Skill and Performance		Healthy, Safe and Active Lifestyles			
Propositions:	Focus on Educative Purposes		Take a Strengths-based Approach	Include a Critical Inquiry Approach	Develop Health Literacy	Value Movement		
Unit title:	2. Reflections of Me			8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning:				
Unit description:	In this unit we explore and analyse health resources and advocate for health, safety and wellbeing and lifelong physical activity.				Land links		Story sharing	Activity 4, 8
				Non-linear		Symbols and images		
				Deconstruct Reconstruct		Non-verbal		
				Learning maps	Activity 3		Community links	

Outcomes

Whole-of-school embedding of *8 Ways* at Casino High School enhanced staff capacity and shifted the way in which lessons were delivered away from 'chalk and talk' towards scaffolded lessons offering diverse and hands-on activities responsive to the learning needs of each individual student. During Term 1 2020, implementation of a wide range of learning opportunities by staff were observed, resulting in high levels of student engagement and task completion.

Learnings

8 Ways was effectively implemented and resulted in increased engagement and learning across the school. Deeper assessment of outcomes is required, but difficult given the current COVID-19 climate.

³⁴ Regional Aboriginal Education Team, Western Area. NSW Department of Education and Communities (2014). *8 Ways: Aboriginal Pedagogy from Western NSW*, RAET, Department of Education and Communities, Dubbo, NSW.

Pedagogy is changed to create learning experiences that engage students: Project Based Learning (PBL) at Kempsey Adventist School

Purpose

To improve student engagement across Years 7 to 10 at Kempsey Adventist School, through pedagogical change characterised by cross-curricular Project Based Learning (PBL) and whole-school cultural shift. The implementation of PBL was specifically designed to improve engagement in learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with the knowledge that progress towards this outcome would result in increased engagement for all students.

Target group

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (n=47) and all non-Indigenous students enrolled in Years 7 to 10 in 2019 and 2020. All teaching staff were also targeted to assist in implementing pedagogical change.

Activities

Teaching staff at Kempsey Adventist School had been developing PBL practices since 2016, and this project significantly assisted in continuing and strengthening this learning journey in 2019 and 2020. Activities included:

- Participation of all secondary teachers in *PBL 201* professional development, designed to develop teaching practices and strategies that help strengthen the quality of student work in a PBL classroom.³⁵
- Planning and delivery of PBL projects throughout Terms 3 and 4, 2019 and Terms 1 and 2, 2020 – for example, the ‘Festival of Cre8tivity’, a week-long initiative where PBL projects replaced traditional classes. With support from their teachers, students were responsible for coming up with project ideas, and planning and running their projects.
- Additional implementation of PBL in specific subject areas including Science, Geography and Visual Arts, as well as cross-curricular projects.

Outcomes

Pedagogical change was achieved through the implementation of PBL, with staff successfully planning and delivering PBL as part of their teaching programming and practice. Evidence from Indigenous students supported increased interest and engagement in learning, with 75 per cent (n=15) of students surveyed rating their enjoyment of PBL as 7 out of 10 or higher.

Learnings

We learned the importance of maintaining the essence of a strategy such as PBL when applied at a whole-school level. We also acknowledge that changing pedagogy and therefore school culture takes many years. Our results show that this initiative is achieving what it set out to, and we must now continue improving the rigour of the projects, supporting staff to embed skills, and improving opportunities for student voice in the process.

“We are committed to striving to be a ‘best practice’ school in Aboriginal education, with a focus on ‘how we do it here’ for everyone, rather than as an isolated strategy.”
(Project report)

Feedback from teaching staff:

“Students seem very engaged in PBL and are attending classes more regularly.”

“Some of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to draw on relatives as ‘experts’ to help them design and express culture.”

Feedback from Indigenous students:

“I like it because I can choose something I am passionate about.”

“I find PBL very hands-on and I can work at my own pace.”

Sculpture created by a Year 9 Aboriginal student during a 2019 ‘Festival of Cre8tivity’



³⁵ Buck Institute for Education PBLWorks, 2020. PBL 201: Improving the Quality of Student Work, <https://www.pblworks.org/pbl-201-workshop-improving-quality-student-work>

Improved literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Kinross Wolaroi School

Purpose

To improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes through the *Wambinya Tutoring Program* (a Wiradjuri word meaning 'support'), developed in response to students requesting additional academic support in areas they were having difficulty.

Target group

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 7 to 12 (n=26).

Activities

All Years 7-12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students received Maths tutoring and Years 10-12 students English tutoring, with the sessions conducted in the boarding houses in appropriate areas for study. Years 7-9 students also attended 'homework club' every Monday afternoon for 1.5 hours, supervised by Student Academic Services. Students were given support to be better prepared for assessment tasks and examination periods through targeted and strategically planned sessions. Collectively each week students received over 18 hours of tutoring, with the sessions divided into 45-minute blocks conducted as one-on-one, pairs or small group sessions of up to four students.

Outcomes

The program has been very well received by students and parents and carers. Eighty-nine per cent of students reported they wished to continue with tutoring, indicating they could see improvements. Ninety-four per cent of students strongly agreed/agreed they had access to a range of support for their academic progress, with six per cent feeling neutral (n=18, Term 1 2020). Students reported feeling less 'stressed' and more confident to be able to contribute during class and are better prepared for assessment tasks and examinations. An unintended outcome was the growth in parents' confidence in the support students were receiving. In Term 4 2019, 67 per cent parents strongly agreed/agreed their child had access to a range of academic support, with 22 per cent feeling neutral. However, in Term 1 2020, 100 per cent parents strongly agreed/agreed their child had access to a range of academic support, with one parent commenting "Just so happy with everything provided so far" (n=9).

Learnings

The program has highlighted the need to support our boarding students after hours, and that students enjoy interacting with their tutors and the affirmation they receive as they improve. Clear expectations need to be set for both students and tutors regarding what it required for a successful program, including students' arriving prepared for the sessions, and tutors aligning areas of work with the current scope and sequence for each year group to allow for more targeted and strategic approaches to the sessions.

"Hey (English Tutor) Just thought I'd let you know how the English assessment task went. I got a total score of 17/20 85% and ranked equal 2nd. Thank you for all of your help this term. It has made such a difference to my confidence, I much appreciated it. Kind regards Student."

When asked if students would like to continue with tutoring:

"Yes because it makes things sink in and makes Maths and other things seem and feel easier."

"Yes please but not just maths. English because I struggle a bit with English."

"Yes because it was somewhat beneficial and knowing I have the extra support keeps me less stressed."

Yes, I feel it has helped my understanding soooo much!"

"Yes I would like to continue because of my choice of extension maths as an elective in years 9 and 10."

"Yes because it helps when assessments come."

"Maybe. Depends on the timetable and my workload."

"No, as I feel like I gain more independent study time and I get more work done."

Parent emails in response to school's tutoring update email:

"Thank you. The support and organisation is fantastic!"

"This is great, thank you!"

Strengthened cultural identity and pride in Indigenous culture and heritage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Knox Grammar School

Purpose

To foster students' sense of identity and pride in their Indigenous culture and nurture them as strong Aboriginal young men, through employing an Indigenous Cultural Mentor, establishing a cultural mentoring program with an emphasis on wellbeing, and creating a stronger net of cultural safety within the school and with the boys' families and community.

Target group

All 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (boarders and day students). The Program also aimed to target and establish cultural connections with students' families and community and the Knox Staff.

Activities

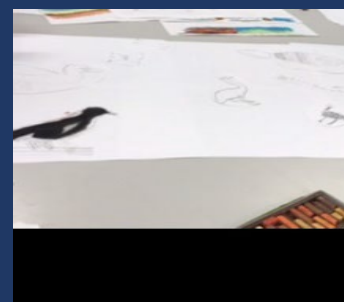
The Indigenous Mentor established relationships with the boys in a structured and familiar manner for a minimum of six hours per week, initially through art workshops and work on the school mural representing the boys' totems. The boys discussed and decided the key cultural areas they wished to learn about, and this informed future activities. The Mentor conducted or organised group cultural learning sessions, cultural dance and group didgeridoo lessons and one-to-one wellbeing mentoring with each student. He also met with staff who cared for the boys as needed. The cultural goals are now working alongside academic and personal goals to give the boys direction. The Mentor also attended ceremonies such as Acknowledgement and Smoking Ceremonies and formal events such as the Induction of the Boarders Leadership Team.

Outcomes

A positive, connected and purposeful relationship has developed through the mentoring program. As a consequence, the boys display an increased sense of cultural safety. For example, they regularly play their didgeridoos in the boarding house and proudly explain to other boarders its story and cultural importance. The students' development is reflected in their connection and pride in developing their totems in the school mural, and their design of the Indigenous jersey artwork. Students are actively participating in school cultural events such as Harmony Day, NAIDOC and Reconciliation including giving Acknowledgements of Country, speeches about their culture and cultural dances – including students who had been too shy to participate even as late as last year (2019).

Learnings

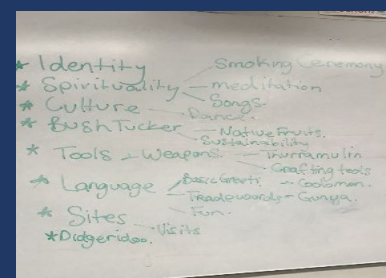
It is important to consult with the AECG regarding employing a cultural mentor from across their network as they know our boys, our context and many of our boys' desires for deep cultural learnings. Establish a routine but be flexible - for the boys and the mentor. Be clear in expectations and sharing of the planning so both school and mentor are aligned. Build the relationship with a wide number of staff who care for the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander students.



Totems – learning from the Mentor, art work for the mural 'Always Was Always Will Be.'

"The sound of the boys playing the didge in the boarding house brings such excitement to the others and the staff - and J and T playing with such pride....what a great development." (House Master, May, 2020)

"My son could not wait to tell me about the didge and the sacred story attached to it. He must have listened intently to [Indigenous Mentor] as he explained it word for word.... their immense pride in learning their culture makes me so proud too." (Parent, April 2020)



Students' feedback regarding cultural areas they wished to learn about.

Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life at Loreto Normanhurst: Community space and Art program

Purpose

To heighten visibility of Indigenous culture and perspectives within the Loreto Normanhurst school community through the creation of a prominent community space for Aboriginal students and their families, and the implementation of a Visual Arts program celebrating Aboriginal women. These initiatives were intended to increase awareness and integration of Indigenous culture and foster a greater sense of belonging and inclusion for Aboriginal students within the school community.

Target group

All 17 Aboriginal students enrolled at Loreto Normanhurst in 2020 and their families, 10 students across Years 7-12 involved in the Art program and the wider school community.

Activities

- Creation of a warm and welcoming community space for Aboriginal students and their families, purposefully located in a prominent area of the school and designed to visibly celebrate Aboriginal culture.
- Design and implementation of a Visual Arts program, *Aboriginal Women of Influence*, celebrating strong Aboriginal women as role models for all Loreto Normanhurst students. The program commenced in Term 4 2019 and continued in 2020 and consisted of 90-minute weekly after school sessions. Students selected an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander woman who is either a public figure or member of their local community to depict in a medium of their choosing. A program exhibition was postponed until later in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Outcomes

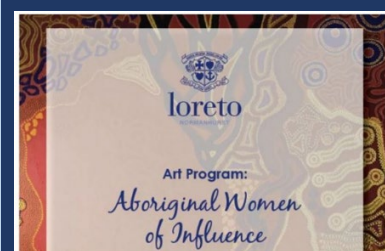
The community space provided a safe place that all Aboriginal students used to connect with each other and the Aboriginal Support Coordinator. Aboriginal students felt a greater sense of belonging and demonstrated greater confidence within the school community. Significant growth in academic outcomes occurred for Aboriginal students, particularly amongst the Year 12 cohort. While there were many contributing factors to students' academic improvement, a correlation with improved sense of belonging and inclusion was observed. Initiatives positively impacted all staff and students through increased visibility and valuing of Aboriginal culture and perspectives within the school.

Learnings

Reinforcement of the need for visible acknowledgement and celebration of Aboriginal culture to ensure that it is in the consciousness of our entire school community. We encourage engagement with stakeholders to ensure needs are heard and responded to and harnessing the promotion and celebration of such projects to raise community awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and perspectives.

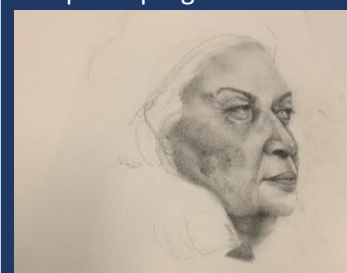
"The community space has given our families a culturally sensitive safe place...It has opened up communication between students, parents and staff...often the conversations have allowed the girls to problem solve things before they get too hard to cope with."

(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator)



"I believe there has been a change...This has helped inform the girls about the diversity of influence and the importance of figures and role models across various fields." (Visual Arts teacher)

Sample of program artwork:



Strengthened and culturally informed relationships between key stakeholders at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School: Aboriginal Education and Engagement role

Purpose

To develop strong and culturally sensitive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, through the employment of an Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer (AEEO). This role was intended to ensure that relationships work in the best interests of each Indigenous student at the school, as defined by the student and their family members. Related initiatives focused on increasing engagement with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and improving cultural competency in school staff and leadership.

Target group

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (n=44) enrolled at Macquarie Anglican Grammar School in 2019 and 2020, and their families, local AECG representatives, as well as all school staff and leadership.

Activities

This aspect of the project commenced with engagement of the local Aboriginal Employment Service, leading to employment of an AEEO in September 2019. Activities and support provided by the AEEO included:

- Leading personalised learning plan meetings for all Indigenous students, with engagement and facilitation of relationships with families, teaching staff, and learning support staff.
- Planning of a BBQ evening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, school staff and leadership to develop a sense of community.
- Leading engagement with the AECG, including attendance meeting support and attendance.
- Development and planned implementation of a cultural competence professional learning program for school staff, unfortunately delayed due to the resignation of the AEEO and COVID-19 disruption.

Outcomes

The AEEO engaged Indigenous students and their parents, the AECG, and school staff, in ways that were positively received and effective for all. Feedback from key stakeholders demonstrated improved connections between school and home, and strengthened and culturally informed relationships with individuals, families, and the broader community. Progress towards outcomes was limited due to the AEEO commencing a position elsewhere in Term 1 2020, immediately followed by the significant disruption caused by COVID-19.

Learnings

Our single greatest learning was the necessity for a school to have at least one AEEO or equivalent in their school. Finding the right person is also vitally important. All students need role models, they need people with whom they can personally and culturally identify. For our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this is of even deeper importance.

“Upon the appointment of the Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer we had a young Aboriginal man in Year 12 who was unfortunately on the path to non-completion due to non-attendance. Today he is studying at university. The AEEO was able to work with him, his family, and the school to solve the school-based issues and help him achieve what he needed to gain entry. He gave the Welcome to Country at our Year 12 Graduation service.” (Project Lead, Project report)

Feedback from Indigenous students about the Aboriginal Education and Engagement Officer:

“She was a really good support system. Someone I could talk to about everything.”

“Before I went to talk to someone about stuff, I went to her for advice.”

“She achieved a lot. She organised the Wiradjuri lessons and the AECG stuff.”

“She talked to Mum and Dad all the time. It was good.”

School Leadership are engaged, supportive and committed to improving outcomes for Indigenous students: Pymble Ladies' College

Purpose

To diversify engagement and leadership in the Indigenous Education space beyond the immediate sphere of our Indigenous Students Co-ordinator (ISC) so that more areas of the College recognise that improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is part of their core brief. A holistic approach to organisational and cultural change was implemented aided by the College's work on a new Strategic Plan.

Target group

The entire College staff, K-12, the entire student body and wider College community. The College has a relatively large number of leaders due to the school's size with some important teams in this project being the Senior Executive, Executive, Heads of Learning Areas, Heads of School, leaders in curriculum and professional learning, and Sport and Co-Curricular Activities.

Activities

Staff working with the College's Indigenous students took bolder outward steps to engage colleagues, especially those in leadership positions, by passing outcomes to them to work towards and/or achieve. The College's Reconciliation Action Plan is now in development with leadership by and membership of the group from a wide range of staff. The ISC does not co-ordinate the working group but is a member who contributes her knowledge and resources. A Head of Learning Area has taken responsibility to work with the Director of Studies and Dean of Curriculum Innovation to set a path for the implementation of Aboriginal Studies. The College's internal professional learning program included two courses on Indigenous culture and education in 2020. The film *"In my blood it runs"*, was shown as a film night for the College community, hosted by three teachers who organised the night to link with the theme for Reconciliation Week.

Outcomes

A change in energy and culture has been noted with more engagement across the entire College, increasing our collective capacity and knowledge in Indigenous education. The evidence is seen in staff volunteering to join groups, learning sessions or activities, and in the ISC being able to focus more on the students themselves, as others take ownership of events, curriculum and initiatives relating to Indigenous areas.

Learnings

We learned that many staff are very keen to enrich their knowledge and understanding and that teacher-leaders come from all kinds of people. We had capacity we had not tapped to this point. College strategy is important in terms of giving overall support to cultural learning in the Indigenous area. The approach is both bottom up and top down. The advice we give is to consider the importance of both and to seek opportunities to broaden the engagement base of staff in Indigenous education leadership. For real and enduring change to occur in Indigenous education outcomes we need to look more broadly than just opportunities for the Indigenous students but rather greater education for all.

"Two members of the College Council were keen to learn more about our response to NRW [National Reconciliation Week], they loved that the NRW assemblies were run by non-Indigenous and Indigenous students."
(Deputy Principal during Reconciliation Action Plan meeting)

Display organised by the Head of Junior School for school foyer:



"It was informative and also provoked a lot of thought and discussion about how we structure school practices and how these could change to give more voice to First Nations people and promote more culturally sensitive practices." (Participant's reflection on internally run Professional Learning course)

Improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for First Nations students at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview: Targeted literacy and numeracy intervention programs

Purpose

To improve literacy and numeracy outcomes of First Nations students at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview, through targeted intervention programs delivered by specialist teachers and further supported by external educational psychologists. These programs were intended to provide student-specific support for achieving academic outcomes, and remedying gaps in student knowledge.

Target group

All transitioning First Nations students in Years 7 to 9 (n=16), including five Year 7, six Year 8, and five Year 9 students.

Activities

The implementation of targeted programs included:

- Student participation in the MacqLit literacy program three times a week, and the QuickSmart numeracy program twice a week, during class time.
- Weekly developmental session for each student with a Speech and Language therapist.
- Guidance and support from a First Nations Tutor, in the boarding house for two hours, three nights a week.
- Student literacy assessment every two weeks with the Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages and annually with the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension.
- Frequent reassessment of student numeracy through the rubrics within the QuickSmart program.
- Implementation of student and staff surveys to qualitatively track student outcomes.

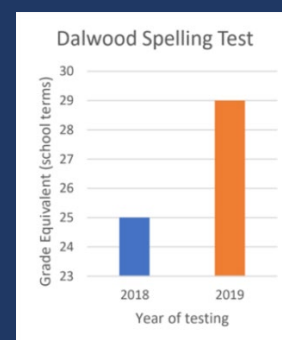
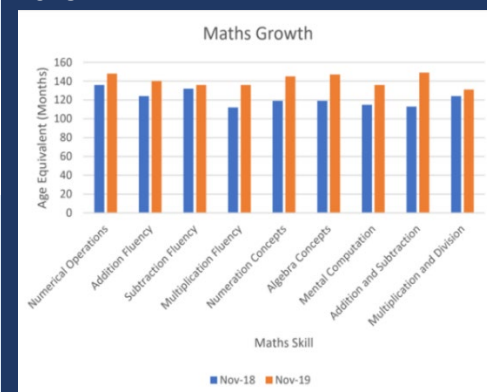
Outcomes

Targeted intervention programs have improved First Nations students' literacy and numeracy outcomes across the board and allowed students to engage with the curriculum more confidently. Evidence from reassessment methods demonstrated significant growth in reading comprehension, fluency, and rate, as well as numerical operations, concepts, and computation. Surveys showed student agreement with improved skills and confidence in reading, writing and maths.

Learnings

We have learned that building on foundational skills in literacy and numeracy is imperative to ensuring students experience learning success, which leads to improved self-esteem and independence as learners. Staff consistency supports the development of authentic and trusting relationships with students, contributing to learning growth. The frequency of support must also be maintained to ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are practiced and repeated, and improvements are consolidated.

An example of literacy and numeracy outcomes in a First Nations student, with results measured in 2018, and again upon Year 7 completion in 2019:



This student was also reassessed by a Speech and Language therapist in June 2020, and demonstrated “a level of generalised improvement in listening and understanding skills,” as well as growth in areas such as “listening to passages of information and taking key-notes” since November 2019 (Project report, Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview).

Students experience a successful transition from school to further education and employment: Post-School Program at Saint Joseph's College, Hunters Hill

Purpose

To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to successfully transition into life after high school through a Post-School Program (PSP) that provides Four Pillars of support:

- Tertiary Education through TAFE or university
- Accommodation arrangements
- Employment assistance to secure part-time or casual work
- Recreation/leisure including local sports and recreation clubs.

Target group

All Year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must engage with the Program. In 2019/20 this involved 11 students.

Activities

The Post-School Program commences mid-way through Year 12. Step 1 is a Meeting Request from the student to the Indigenous Coordinator to commence the PSP, establishing expectations that the student is taking the initiative and responsibility for their future. Step 2 involves the student and Indigenous Coordinator meeting for the initial planning phase where the Four Pillars are explained, the student's strengths, interests and goals discussed, and university degrees or TAFE courses that match these strengths and interests explored. UAC applications are created, potential accommodation, work and recreation options are considered, and 'action lists' are created for both the Coordinator and student. Step 3 – Action – involves students actioning the items before requesting another meeting. Step 4 is a Follow-up Meeting where tertiary education plans are confirmed, often consisting of submitting UAC applications and completing alternate university entry or scholarship applications. Step 5 – Completion – ensures students have comprehensive support plans in place encompassing the Four Pillars prior to graduation.

Outcomes

There has been very positive feedback that the support provided has enhanced student confidence and well-being as they complete Year 12 and their HSC and increased their aspirations towards further education and future employment opportunities. Students and their families also feel cared for as they transition into life after school. Eighty-one per cent of respondents to the 2019 SJC Indigenous Program parent and community survey 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their "son's aspirations and options for life after school have improved because of his support".

Learnings

The Four Pillars Program is based on our learnings that many Indigenous students are the first in their families to graduate high school and consider tertiary education (this was the case for six of the seven graduates of 2019). From discussions with students we learned that there was little understanding of how to apply for university, arrange accommodation or financially support themselves. Thus, the PSP was immediately initiated and then formalised as a mandatory part of the SJC Indigenous Program.

*"I have never thought about going to university. Now I want to go to Macquarie University and become a teacher."
(Future graduate of 2021 comment after engaging with a university program through the College in 2019)*

*"I never had any goals after school but now I do."
(Indigenous Program student survey)*

"To me it is as though he can see more doors being opened now." (Indigenous Program parent and community survey)

"My son has always strived for better things, he had an issue with some learning in the beginning at Joeys, however he has always wanted a career, and to become something of significance. He is now at the stage where he is really thinking about what's possible. His ideas have changed overtime, though he is keen to be a teacher now! I believe this is because he is receiving great support." (Indigenous Program parent and community survey)

"My son is looking at medicine as an option now." (SJC Indigenous Program parent and community survey)

Improved educational, cultural, and emotional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Shore: Student Support Counsellor role and Koori Club

Purpose

To improve support provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Shore, through the creation of a permanent support role and the establishment of a student support group. The permanent role of Student Support Counsellor was intended to contribute towards a positive transition for students into the school and boarding environment, as well as provide ongoing support for Indigenous student development and wellbeing.

Target group

All thirteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Shore in 2020, including eight boarding students and five day students.

Activities

Support provided by the Student Support Counsellor included:

- Invitation to all Indigenous students to be part of a group self-named the Koori Club.
- Facilitation of fortnightly Koori Club meetings to encourage identification of cultural and emotional needs in a supportive and social environment over shared food and laughter.
- Weekly meetings with all students either one-to-one or in small groups to build relationships, mutual aid, and respect.
- Termly meetings with all teachers of each student to case plan on an individual student basis, as well as regular meetings with House staff to highlight specific student needs.
- Working closely with other key supports, such as the Yalari Support Officer and Cultural Coach, to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach.
- Building connections with students' families via phone and regular meetings and listening to family concerns and suggestions.

Outcomes

Evidence from conversation with the students and their families, as well as staff, suggested a stronger, more connected, happy and safe group of young men. Staff demonstrated more active involvement in the management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classes and Houses and showed increased awareness of individual student academic and social history that may be influencing educational development.

Learnings

The project encouraged our school to deeply reflect on the ways we could develop additional support for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Improving outcomes for our boys has been memorable, eye opening and heart wrenching all at the same time. Connection, honesty, trust, respect, and collaboration are the key areas to build and maintain for the future of all of our students.

"I am going to develop, listen, ask and challenge everyone here and in this school to find the best, most successful way of allowing these young men to flourish through their time here. For them to come out at the other end having accepted this challenge by listening to their hearts, their culture, and the wise around them." (Student Support Counsellor)

"Thank you for guiding my practice in the classroom with our Aboriginal boys, your recent email was brilliant and opened my eyes to language and history." (House Master)

"...your role has made it clear where we must head to support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys completely." (Director of Studies)

"Thank you for all the wonderful work with our boys that this support role has developed. It is opening up the eyes of the whole school community." (Parent)

Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' literacy, numeracy, and other academic outcomes at Taree Christian School

Purpose

To improve the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, close some of the gaps in their abilities and bring them closer to their peers academically by providing intensive support that directly targeted those students who were under performing in literacy and numeracy. The approach was to identify students' abilities through assessment data and teacher direction and employ an aide to provide support to students in class and through withdrawal.

Target group

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from K - Year 6 who were identified as under-performing in literacy and/or numeracy (33 students in 2019 and 16 students in 2020).

Activities

The main focus was individual reading and small group reading sessions, as well as supporting students directly during Maths lessons. The Fitzroy reading program was utilised, using leveled texts and follow-up worksheets encompassing comprehension skills, phonics knowledge, writing and fluency in oral reading. In Maths the student support aide guided students through the main body of the lesson and assisted them individually through modified work. Eight students across four classes in Years 3-4 received literacy support for 10 periods per fortnight. One student in Year 2 received one period of support per fortnight. One student in Year 5/6 received five periods per fortnight for individual Maths and literacy support in class. Five students in Stage 2 Maths received individual or group support for three periods per fortnight.

Outcomes

While some students showed limited progress, others made great gains. Overall, there was a greater engagement in day to day learning, particularly amongst Stage 2 students who had extended periods of direct support. Some teachers commented that the targeted students exhibited improved focus and effort in class and increased willingness to complete work and attempt challenging tasks. There were more opportunities to engage with students' families and talk specifically about students' academic work. One unexpected aspect of the project was the encouragingly positive relationships the students developed with the aide. They built a rapport with each other and the students confidently went with her when withdrawn. The aide also developed a deep care for these children and often went above and beyond what she was required to do.

Learnings

We learned the importance of meeting regularly to keep the program operating and adjusted where necessary. We also learned that positive connections and relationships are vital to engagement. Keeping consistent data and track of what is being done/taught is important. Individual reading and discussion times are very helpful. Tips are to meet regularly as a team, focus on a couple of goals and invest in them, and use an evidence folder.

"Thank you for this awesome update so proud of her doing good!" (Parent communication with teacher regarding child's progress)

"Time is the keyword. I have seen awesome progress in most of the children I have had consistent time with, despite this time some children are still showing great need." (Teacher's aide)

"What I am finding works well is being with the children in their classrooms. Working beside them to understand and work towards completing their classwork, in turn achieving in their day and taking pride in their work. I'm finding now that some of the children are wanting to share their classroom achievements with me. They will ask me to come into their room so they can show what they've achieved on their own, read me a piece of writing they are working on or show me how they've changed their monster on the class dojo because of the points they've earned." (Student support aide)

Supporting a positive and successful transition into school and the boarding environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at The Scots College

Purpose

To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to successfully transition into Year 7 and ensure that they and their families feel confident in navigating The Scots College community through providing academic, social, cultural, and emotional support and connection to community. This will contribute to reducing homesickness and ensure that the challenges of away-from-home schooling can be overcome.

Target group

All four Year 7 students and their families, and Year 7 Boarding House and staff.

Activities

An audit of existing school planning transition was undertaken and as a result a strategy implemented to develop a culturally supportive transition plan for each student based on best practice. The transition process began with the appropriate selection of students, allowing them to sample the College prior to accepting a position and working closely with the boys' families in their home communities. This included providing a Trial Sample Stay (Term 4, 2019). Visits were undertaken to each new student's home community, particularly for interstate students, to build strong relationships with the students' families, creating a circle of trust and two-way commitment. Abstudy Travel was utilised to enable interstate parents to visit during Term 1. All students were provided with organisational skills support including preparing for their day, understanding school timetabling, responding to emails, developing good study habits, goal setting, working towards deadlines and completing assessments.

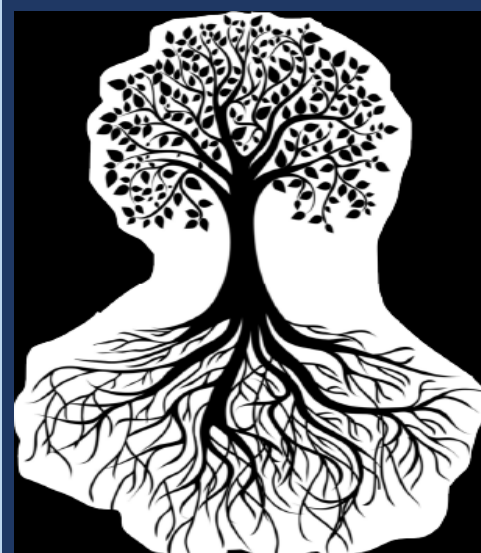
Outcomes

One hundred per cent of Years 7, 8 and 9 students completed Personalised Learning Plans and interviews were held with 90 per cent of parents to discuss and share their child's PLP. The students have developed good study habits and are responsive. Parents are very supportive and respond well to the regular communication from the College, and their feedback is always positive. There has been an increase in academic results for Term 1 2020.

Learnings

Our students come from diverse communities and home situations. Each boy and his family's barriers will be different to other boys in the program. It is important for the school to always have high expectations for boys and families, what this looks like and the support that is delivered will be different for every situation.

An important element of supporting student transition is working with the student to develop a Transition Statement as part of their Personalised Learning Plan. Students are provided with an Indigenous focused template which has a strong emphasis on personal and cultural beliefs. It includes the tree image below with spaces for students on the parts of the tree to complete with their personal details.



My roots: Where I come from and what my family hope for me

Ground: Where I live

Trunk: What makes me happy, motivated, and strong

Branches: My hopes and dreams

Leaves: People who are important to me

Fruits: My special gifts and talents.