Cohesion Continuum

ais nsw | Community Cohesion

What does cohesion look like in schools?

Cohesive school communities are strong and resilient; they celebrate diversity and ensure belonging for all.

Signs of a strong, cohesive school community include:

- Safe and respectful learning environments
- Intercultural capabilities that foster inclusion and acceptance of difference
- Critical thinking and understanding how to navigate online spaces responsibly

- Student voice and representation are considered across all areas of school life
- Celebrating our diverse communities
- Engaging families and local community
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds

The 4 domains that support and foster cohesion are:

Intercultural Understanding: Inclusive Spaces

Family and Community Engagement

Sense of Belonging

Interfaith Dialogue

Cohesion in schools is crucial for preparing students to be responsible, informed and active participants in a globalized world. It equips them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to contribute positively to global challenges and foster a more connected and inclusive future.

The Phases of the Cohesion Continuum

## Discovery

The *Discovery* phase signifies uncertainty about what your school might need to enhance cohesion and inclusion. The questions in this phase will provoke thought and reflection about where you are right now and where you want to be.

Grounding

The *Grounding* phase is the discussion and design phase for your school, implementing strategies at a micro level as you begin to understand the diverse needs of your school community.
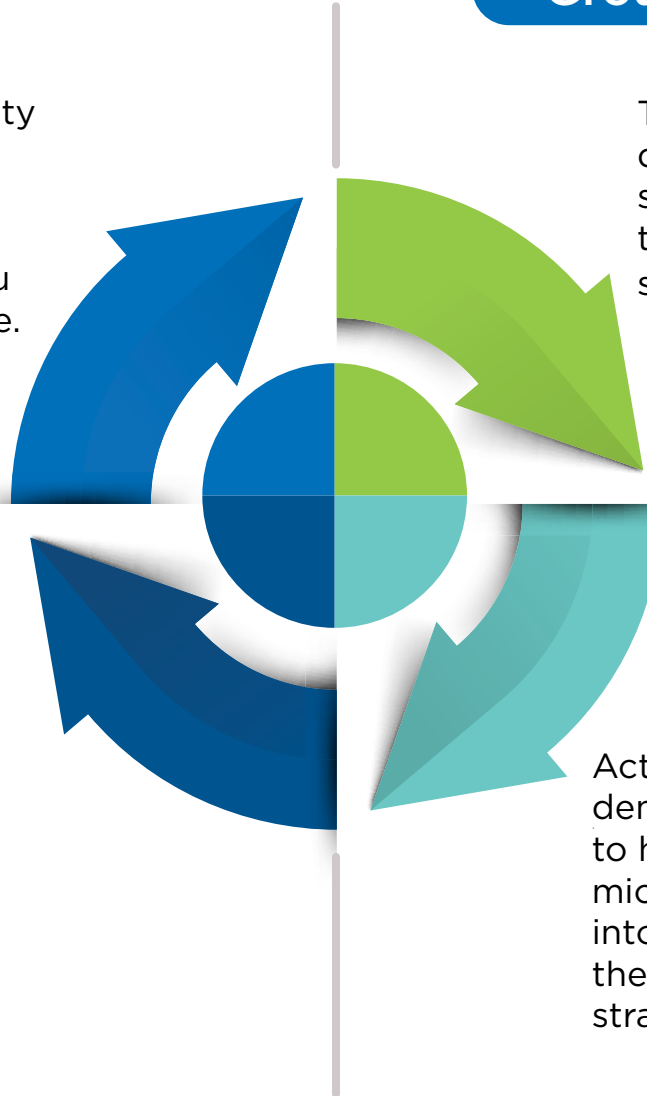
Sustaining

The strategies that are implemented from the *Sustaining* phase indicate that the school has successfully promoted the elements to support Global Citizenship and there are clear sustainability plans in place for the future.

Cultivation

Activities in the *Cultivating* phase demonstrate where the growth begins to happen. The changes move from micro to macro and begin to weave into the fabric of the school, with the focus shifting to whole school strategies.

Intercultural Understanding: Inclusive Spaces

Discovery

- Is diversity celebrated in your school beyond national or international observances, i.e Harmony Day, International Day of Peace, NAIDOC etc.
- Is there ever an obvious Us Vs Them narrative among students?
- Is there a clear divide between different cultural groups of students?
- Do teachers always model respectful conversations with their diverse student cohorts?
- Is there signage displayed around your school that makes it accessible to all the languages that are spoken within your school community?

Grounding

- Putting up "Welcome Signs" in multiple languages around the school to ensure cultural visibility and inclusion.
- Attend & implement professional learning around "Intercultural Understanding and building belonging within a diverse classroom" to develop critical thinking and cultural empathy among school community.
  - Celebrate observances and embed in the curriculum – Harmony Day, NAIDOC Week – have significant and respectful conversations around the importance of these celebrations., Consider inviting community and/or religious elders, community groups and artist.

Sustaining

- Implementation of a cross-cultural student mentor system.
- Incorporation of examples from students' communities and cultural groups in teaching & learning. Including incorporating the funds of knowledge from families (Inquiry Based learning with parent contributions and participation).
- Implement Intercultural Education classes as an extra-curricula activity, which explores different cultures through activities, food, celebrations etc.
- Broaden service based learning opportunities

Cultivation

- Adding a "Story Sharing" column in school newsletter to provide opportunities for connection across the school community.
- Get students to develop ideas and practical strategies around what an inclusive culturally diverse education setting looks like; host a Youth Summit to consolidate ideas and enhance student voice and representation.
- Student led Social Action campaigns, e.g Anti-Racism/Upstander campaigns.

Sense of Belonging

Discovery

- Are school values clear, understood and practiced across the entire school community?

- What opportunities does the school provide to celebrate diverse student identity?

- When are students given the opportunity to share their personal stories/interests?

- Do students have nurturing relationships with teachers/peers outside of an academic focus?

Grounding

- Implement a clear and accessible pastoral structure to foster a consistency of care, i.e mentor groups.

- Include students as co-designers of school and classroom spaces.

- On a classroom level, allow students to participate in "Passion Projects" to encourage engagement in their work and to deepen their value of learning.

Sustaining

- Representation of culturally diverse food in the canteen.

- Key school documents and policies are translated into languages other than English.

- Consider a Belonging Policy, with intentional activities such as:

    – Twice a term "Breakfast with a Friend" event to foster community and connection without pressure.

    – Daily time given to students for mindfulness/awareness, e.g 5 minutes after recess to connect and reflect.

    – Implement a Peer Support system to ensure that younger cohorts feel supported and connected to their older peers. This also provides a back up to the mentor groups structure.

Cultivation

- Positive Behaviour program i.e Star Awards.

- Demonstrate care and interest through opening and closing routines to begin and end lessons, i.e Build Community with Classroom Circles.

- Get to know students as people through informal means, e.g encourage playground conversations, bring personal experiences into the classroom – remember to weave social and emotional experiences among the academic ones.

Family and Community Engagement

Discovery

- Do at least 80% of your families understand your school goals, curriculum, and the social objectives of your school?

- Is the signage reflecting all the major languages of your school community?

- Does the school provide times and opportunities accessible to everyone to meet with teachers to discuss student progress?

- Are teachers provided with guidance around the impacts that world events may have on the wider school community and ways to sensitively respond to families that may be impacted?

Grounding

- Use a homework activity to get students to engage parents and to learn about cultural background and upbringing.

- Conduct survey or informal focus group sessions to understand and assess communication needs of families from non-English speaking backgrounds, using multi-modal communication.

- Create a visibly multilingual and multicultural school environment by displaying signs, banners and other materials that acknowledge and celebrate the diverse families in your school community.

Sustaining

- Focus groups including families for whole-school policy development.

- Devise a diverse Parent Forum Advisory Group to contribute to school decisions.

- Designate a special space for families and community members visiting or working in the school, e.g parent room which encourages connectedness among families and breaks down barriers between school and home.

- Host termly events that celebrate diversity through food and cultural activities.

Cultivation

- Design and provide a parental support guide for homework, ensuring that it is simple and without jargon.

- Provide alternative opportunities to families who cannot attend Parent Teacher evenings.

- Ensure that school events are open and accessible to all parents; i.e communication, times, dates etc. Utilise translators/interpreters where appropriate.

- Display student work, awards and celebrations of achievement as well as products designed by community members that reflect relevant cultural context.

- Provide space for teachers and staff to process and determine how to engage with students and families after social and political events that impact the wider community.

Interfaith Dialogue

Discovery

- Are there students with diverse religious beliefs in your school community?
- Are there stereotypes and often prejudiced views in your school community?
- Is there a clear divide between different religious groups?
- Are religions other than the one that your school is affiliated with, celebrated?

Grounding

- Celebrations and acknowledgement of religious observances.
- Interfaith Wide Reading program.
- Organise for an Interfaith Agency such as Together for Humanity, to come to your school to deliver workshops for staff and students to commence the conversation and break through any barriers.
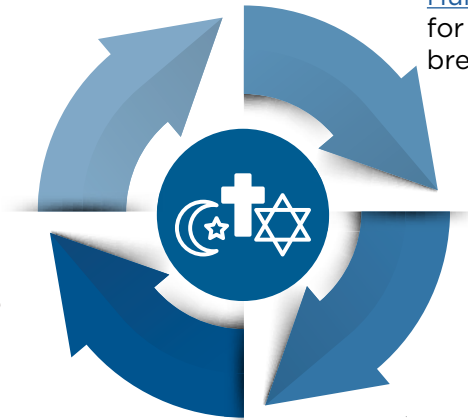
Sustaining

- Student Led professional learning to address student identified gaps.
- Social Justice Action Plans.
- Interfaith Literacy Program.
- Diversity in uniform to allow for multi-faith practice and representation.
- Community engagement to support ongoing interfaith initiatives and activities.

Cultivation

- Student Voice and storytelling programs.
- "Circle Time" in classrooms/mentor groups to share stories.
- Guided tours/offsite education programs, e.g Jewish Museum, Temples, Mosques.

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