

Schools Plus 

Impact Report 2021

A photograph of two school children running through a blue metal gate. The child in the foreground is seen from behind, wearing a blue backpack, a blue bucket hat, and a grey and white checkered dress. The child in the background is a boy in a white shirt, also running. The scene is set outdoors on a paved path next to a brick wall and greenery.

**TOGETHER,
WE CAN HELP
CLOSE THE
EDUCATION
GAP**

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Schools Plus is a national not-for-profit that exists to help close the education gap caused by disadvantage. We work with teachers and schools to create lasting change to help students succeed.

Since we started fundraising in 2015, Schools Plus has directed nearly \$27m to schools with an ICSEA value below 1000.

Our projects have benefited over 330,000 students, 1,040 schools and 23,000 teachers*

A message from our CEO

I am delighted to introduce you to Schools Plus’s latest Impact Report, showcasing just a few of the incredible stories of change that we have had the pleasure of supporting. Schools Plus exists to help students succeed at school, specifically students who face extra barriers to succeeding, whether that be due to their rural location, their socio-economic background, having English as a secondary language or because they have additional needs.

We have now supported over 330,000 students in 1,040 schools across Australia since our inception in 2015. This phenomenal statistic has been made possible by our incredibly generous donors, who have enabled us to direct nearly \$27m in support to the schools we work with. Our work does not just encompass project funding though. Our coaching support, knowledge sharing program and evaluation frameworks work in collaboration with our project funding to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to best help their students succeed.

This report has been grouped into themes to help summarise some of the key areas of focus of our work, and also includes some heart-warming stories of recovery from our Crisis Appeal in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to disrupt learning for thousands of students, including many of the most vulnerable. We are working hard to fund and deliver programs to support student re-engagement and mental wellbeing to help these students recover as quickly as possible over the coming months.

We hope you enjoy reading our stories of impact as much as we have enjoyed working with the passionate and inspiring teachers and school leaders that have delivered them. By all of us working together, we really can help close the education gap caused by disadvantage.



Rosemary Conn
CEO, Schools Plus

ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage)
*Beneficiaries includes all students for all projects – including those not yet acquitted

HOW WE DRIVE CHANGE

Schools Plus provides funding, coaching and other resources to enable teachers to bring to life projects which will make a difference to their students.

Our Programs

- Our Smart Giving program provides schools across Australia with support for a variety of 12-18 month projects in areas such as STEM, mental health and wellbeing, and literacy and numeracy.
- Fair Education funds projects encouraging family and community engagement, over an initial three-year period, with a view to creating lasting change for the participating schools, their students and local community.
- We run the Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards to celebrate and acknowledge the pivotal role that great teachers play in closing the education gap. Award recipients receive funding for projects in their school and take part in an exclusive Fellowship program.
- We also offer support to schools with community led fundraising, including our crowdfunding platform. This enables eligible schools to raise funds for their projects while benefiting from our tax deductible status.



Coaching

Schools Plus has a team of over 30 experienced educational coaches who work alongside teachers and school leaders in planning, delivering and evaluating their projects. Our coaches come from a variety of qualified backgrounds, including Department Directors, Principals and Education Specialists.

2,814

hours of coaching delivered

97%

of teachers said coaching helped them to **design and implement their projects**

90%

of teachers said coaching boosted their **leadership capability**



Knowledge Sharing

We work to help close the education gap by sharing learnings and insights gained through the initiatives that schools are employing to help their students to succeed. Our knowledge sharing program consists of free events, open to the broader education community, and program specific activities for our community of practice.



12 events
1,044 registrations



Evaluation

We provide schools with evaluation frameworks that enable them to track their projects' progress, success and learnings. Our evaluation tools also provide strategic insights to help students succeed within specific school contexts.

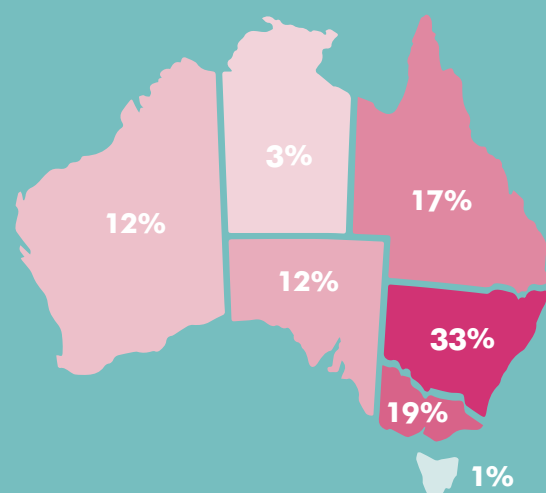
OUR IMPACT

During the period of this report*, Schools Plus funded projects to a value of nearly \$9m, expected to benefit over 136,000 students.

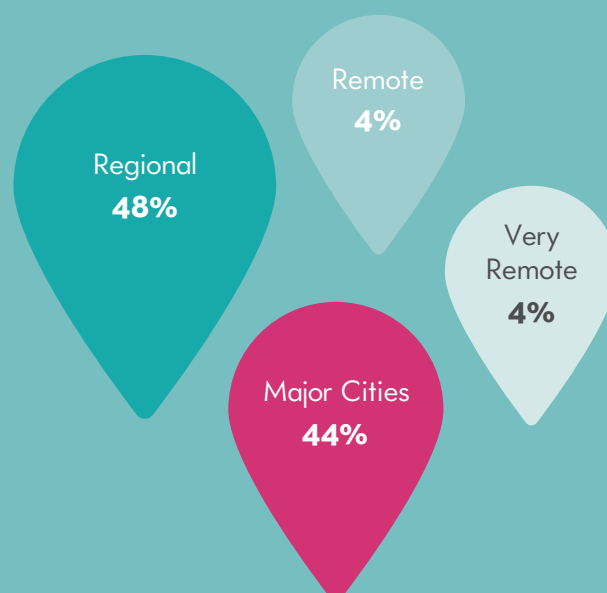
Our Smart Giving and Fair Education programs were opened for applications in 2020. 574 applications were received, and 159 projects were granted funding. An additional 58 schools received \$10,000 to support urgent needs arising from bushfires and COVID-19.

Our projects often support more than one area of focus and will acquit at different times. To ease reporting, we have assigned a key focus area to the projects supported over the period of this report. During this period, 121 projects were completed, with a further 202 in progress.

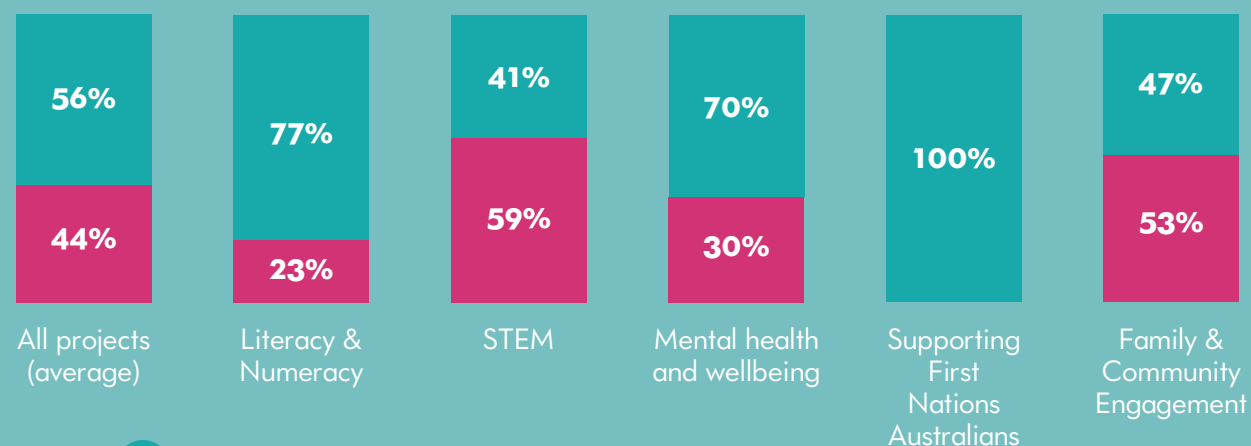
Projects by state



Projects by location



Project theme by location



Metro Regional & Remote



Schools are asked whether their project has achieved the goals they set at the outset.

82%

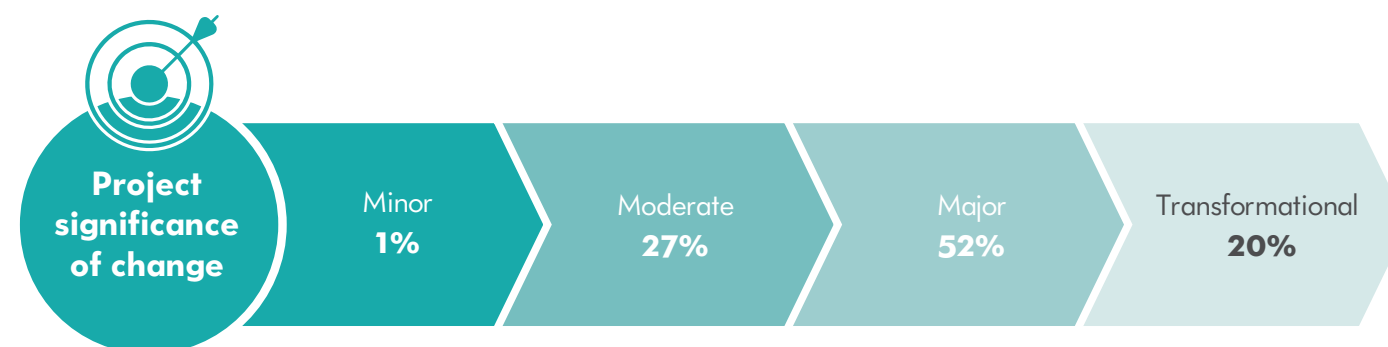
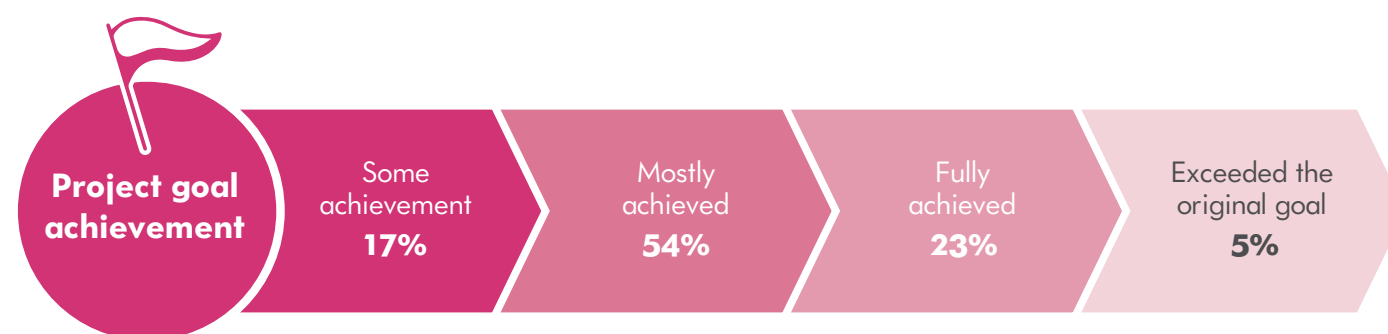
say they have achieved their project goal.

5%

say they have exceeded their goal.

72%

say the change in their school has been major to transformational.



*Due to COVID-19, some projects were delayed. The period of this report was extended to include projects that have commenced or completed between 1/10/19 and 1/4/21.

CRISIS APPEAL

Recovery from bushfires and COVID-19

Over the last two years, schools have faced, and continue to face, challenges on a scale never seen before. Bushfires, floods, drought and COVID-19 have combined to create unprecedented levels of trauma, anxiety and relentless, rapid change for students, teachers, families and school communities. Schools Plus responded by launching a Crisis Appeal, which raised more than \$2m and has so far supported more than 130 schools, 24,000 students and 2,000 teachers.

Our Support

While the direct threat of natural disaster has subsided in most regions, new COVID-19 variants, border closures and snap lockdowns continue to disrupt children's learning. From speaking with schools in crisis affected areas, we know their recovery will continue for years and **our support in this area is ongoing.**



Urgent Support

- Provide remote learning resources and support



Medium term needs

- Build resilience and lower anxiety
- Upskill teachers in trauma informed practice



Long term recovery

- Re-engage students in learning
- Support mental health and wellbeing
- Close gaps in learning

Supporting mental health and wellbeing after devastating bushfires

The local community at Batemans Bay lived through the devastating impact of bushfires followed by an outbreak of COVID-19. Principal Kel Smerdon spoke of the destruction and trauma in a Schools Plus hosted online session in November 2020.

"We are dealing with the impact of social isolation, having been totally cut off from the rest of the world. No electricity, no gas, no cash (no electricity to run the ATMs), only the food in your cupboards... These events magnified the issues we already faced in a mixed demographic community, with increased domestic violence, housing issues, financial implications for families losing their incomes... This manifested itself in anxiety in the classroom, fidgeting, inability to concentrate. It was a challenging time."

The school used Crisis Appeal funding to employ a family liaison officer, create a community garden and build a ninja warrior course to give the children a place to take a 'brain break', increase physical activity and offer a means to talk while moving. The school also built a creative and practical arts hut to provide a safe space for children to come in and talk if they would like to.



"Sitting at the base of all humanity is the simple act of humans caring for humans."

– Kel Smerdon, Principal Batemans Bay.



Books for Undera Primary School

At Undera Primary School in north-eastern Victoria, many of the 21 students are from families who lost their livelihoods due to severe drought in the region. When the school moved to remote learning under COVID-19 restrictions, Undera Principal, Dave Farrell, used urgent support funding to pay for the printing and delivery of learning packs and a new book for each of his students.

“I can’t thank you enough. Your help made a significant difference to the Undera school community.”

– Dave Farrell, Principal.



Re-engaging students after disrupted learning

Less than 20% of students at Invermay Primary School, TAS, had access to the technology they needed for remote learning during the pandemic. Upon returning to school, teachers knew they needed to re-engage students in learning before they fell even further behind. Teachers were upskilled so they could run coding, animation and robotics projects.

After six months, students have handpicked their own robotics kits, collaborated with industry professionals, and launched a lunchtime LEGO club, where **85% of attendees are those who were identified as most at-risk of disengaging.**



BUILDING STEM & FUTURE CAPABILITIES

According to the Federal Government's Innovation Statement*, 75% of jobs in the fastest-growing industries require workers with STEM skills, yet the number of Australian students studying science and maths in high school is dropping, with unequal access to technology in disadvantaged areas exacerbating this disparity.



120

schools supported



31,456

students supported

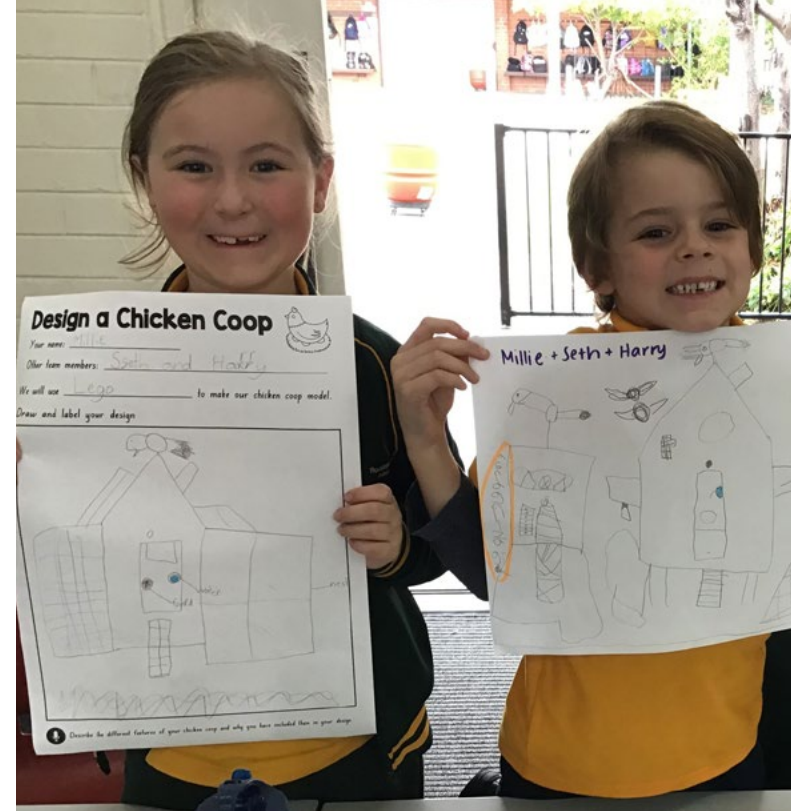
Engaging girls in STEM

Hoxton Park Public School, NSW, had a thriving Robotics Lab where students could code and build robots, but participation rates for girls were far lower than those for boys.

Hoxton Park launched quarterly "Girls in STEM" days, where activities were co-designed with students and tailored specifically to girls' interests. Girls worked with sustainable energy kits and met with female tech-sector professionals to learn more about the industry.

Following the project, girls' enrolment in STEM programs increased, girls were more confident in STEM, more engaged in learning and expressed an eagerness to continue in their future studies.

"As a teacher, it was really enlightening to see the approach that the girls took towards problem-solving, working collaboratively and producing a final product."



Nurturing young problem solvers

Rockingham Beach Primary School, WA, wanted its early learners to be creative, confident, and innovative problem solvers. With an upgrade to its STEM learning space and collaboration sessions between teachers and the resident STEM leader, kids spent lessons working on real-world problems.

Since the program's launch, students' **STEM skills are developing at 1.4 times the expected rate.**

Future Focused Skills

Schools Plus has supported a variety of other projects designed to help prepare students for the workplace after school.

Encouraging enterprise

Shepherdson College is located on remote Elcho Island off the coast of Northeast Arnhem Land, where paid employment opportunities for school-leavers are scarce. The school purchased supplies to create goods like cards, jewellery, and T-shirts to kick-start student-led small business ventures. Students worked together to research business ideas, create products and sell them to the community, combining students' interests in art, design or nutrition with practical financial literacy learning like budgeting, profit-and-loss, and taxation.

The school has launched its own website to extend sales to the mainland. SYB Dhapirrk, a T-shirt design business developed by Senior Years' boys, won last year's Northern Territory Young Business Award.

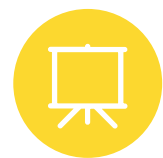
Students' financial literacy skills have improved significantly, with those working on enterprise projects growing a full year in their financial literacy outcomes. As word spread, the local community started to develop its own ideas for enterprises, generating a genuine cultural shift in financial literacy in the community.



*https://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/sites/default/files/STEM_AustraliasFuture_Sept2014_Web.pdf

SUPPORTING LITERACY & NUMERACY SKILLS

Literacy and numeracy are the fundamental building blocks of a child's education and key to a thriving society. School-led projects to address this need include professional development for teachers, workshops for parents and evidence-based programs to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of students from Kindergarten through to high school.



41

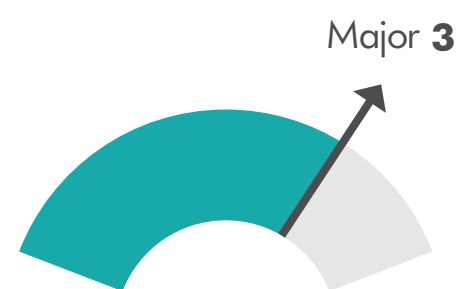
schools supported



8,975

students supported

Last year, 52% of applications for support were linked to literacy and numeracy learning. **Literacy and Numeracy projects had the highest average impact across themes.**



All projects

Level of impact (out of 4)



Literacy & Numeracy projects

Level of impact (out of 4)



Improving reading outcomes

At Toora Primary School in rural Victoria, the 38 students are split across just two classes: Prep - Year 2 and Years 3 - 6. The lack of differentiated learning between year groups coupled with old, outdated texts left reading enthusiasm, and outcomes, on the decline.

“Students had become accustomed to having to read a photocopied book, often negotiating to share the one ‘real’ copy between them... This was extremely demoralising and directly led to student disengagement.”

Equipped with professional development for teachers and new texts for students, the school started to teach and assess learning according to reading level, not age or year group.

Students' reading skills are now developing faster than the expected rate, with the number of students at or above the standard level increasing.



Personalised learning in literacy

At Adelaide's Elizabeth Park Primary School, two in three students start school with developmental delays, have a learning disability and at the time of applying for funding, most students were not reading at the expected level.

The school created a Literacy Improvement Team by upskilling existing teachers and employing a reading coach and speech pathologist. Students' language skills were tested, with low achievers placed in specialised small groups and the most at-risk given one-on-one learning opportunities. The school started a book club where parents could speak with the Reading Coach and understand how to best support their child's development.

Last year, Elizabeth Park surpassed all its state reading targets, with **70% of students at or above the standard achievement level.**

“So thankful to have sessions like this. It helps us to teach them better. Thank you for connecting us with the school.” – Parent



Early literacy intervention leads to systemic change

A cluster of Port Augusta schools aimed to improve the early literacy of their 3-5 year old school starters.

The intervention consisted of:



A curated suite of apps for preschool children to use at home



A targeted professional learning program for early years teachers



A workshop program for parents and carers aligned to the professional learning for educators.

It was independently evaluated by Flinders University and Prof. Pamela Snow of La Trobe University conducted a research report on it.

The Department of Education for SA commented:

“The report holds great value for officers making recommendations to sites about literacy app choice and usage, with the use of apps through online learning particularly relevant in the current environment.”

Following the report, the Department has collaborated with the project leaders in developing the Department’s Early Years Learning Strategy.

The apps used in the project have now been included in the Learning@Home website which was developed for families in response to COVID-19, meaning the positive impact of this project has been far-reaching and long-term.



Image: Toora Primary School

NURTURING STUDENT WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT

Student mental wellbeing underpins every aspect of a child's schooling, including their ability to learn, be resilient and build positive relationships. The events of recent years (bushfires, drought and COVID-19) have brought the emphasis on mental health to the fore. In our recent survey, 38% of schools indicated that mental wellbeing support was their primary focus in 2021, more than any other area.



76

schools supported



22,354

students supported

It is estimated that poor mental wellbeing accounts for 10-25% of the education gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children.*

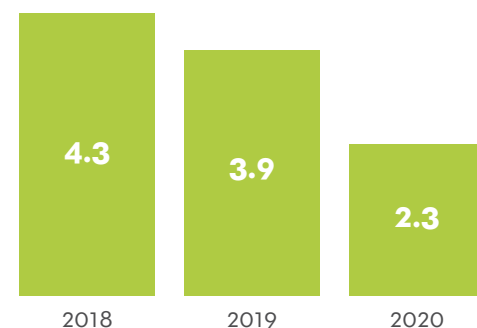
Projects supporting mental health and wellbeing often include strategies to develop teachers' skills in addressing mental health issues, teach students social and emotional skills and ensure an accessible and inclusive school environment for the school community.

Positive Education improves attendance

Low staff morale and student wellbeing kickstarted a whole-school shift towards Positive Education at Gympie State High School, QLD, where punishment was swapped out for positive reinforcement.

Gympie delivered school-wide professional development to teachers, staff and support workers on Positive Education who passed it on to their students. Lunchtime activities were developed for students to be challenged, build resilience, and maintain positive relationships.

Behaviour incidents per student



Since the project, attendance rates have improved, student and parent engagement has increased and **the number of behavioural incidents almost halved.**

*<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/identify-students.aspx>

Student Engagement

Disengaged students cannot properly learn, may be involved in behavioural incidents and are more likely to drop out of school altogether. Sitting closely alongside mental health and wellbeing, initiatives to support student engagement aim to ensure students have a sense of connection with their learning and a sense of belonging to their school.

Engagement can be influenced by a variety of factors – the way a teacher delivers their lessons, the space in which a child is learning or the learning culture at the school.

Play spaces reduce conflict

At Lincoln Gardens Primary School in regional SA, frequent physical and verbal conflicts during break times were disrupting learning, with students returning to class disengaged and unable to focus.

In order to build relationships and social skills, the school constructed safe playtime spaces like a Minecraft room and nature play area where students could problem solve, play and learn together.

One year later and **the school has reported zero student conflicts** in the new play spaces and very few suspensions overall. Now, after breaktime, students return to class calm, engaged and ready to learn.



DELIVERING IMPACT THROUGH GREAT TEACHING

The single biggest factor impacting a child's success at school is their teacher.



Many of our programs incorporate professional development for teachers as a strategy underpinning the project's success. Creating a culture of learning and professional development within a school has been identified as a key factor in the success of many Schools Plus projects. Schools Plus further supports this with our coaching and knowledge sharing programs.



99

schools supported



42,715

students supported

Improved teaching practice delivers NAPLAN results

Perth Primary School, WA, has worked hard in recent years to improve student outcomes, introducing initiatives to improve teaching practice in maths and spelling. But in writing, students were still not reaching their potential and the school identified a need to build its teachers' capacity to teach this key skill.

The school underwent whole-staff training in the most effective methods of teaching writing, differentiating lessons based on individual writing levels and ensuring writing lessons were engaging for students.

After six months, 85% of students showed progress in their writing skills and NAPLAN data indicated that 100% of students were at or above the expected level for writing.



SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS AUSTRALIANS

First Nations Australians are more likely to experience educational disadvantage. Evidence shows that 20% of the gap in school performance between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students is attributed to lower school attendance.*

Engaging First Nations students is a key consideration for many of the teachers we work with, and will often be encompassed within another project theme such as supporting student mental health and wellbeing, building connections to families and the local community, or STEM learning.



14

schools supported



2,361

students supported

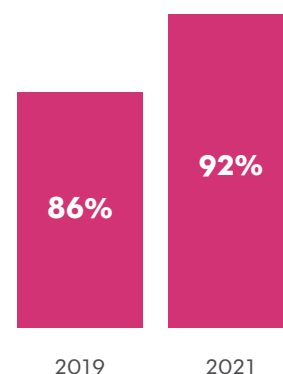
Dedicated resource to drive family and community engagement

Beaconsfield State School, QLD, appointed a school support officer to engage local families and encourage attendance. The support officer has been building relationships with local families, working with the local children and family centre and helping student leaders to set a student code of conduct following feedback and consultation.

The relationship between school and local families is flourishing; the school is asked to actively promote community events, a recognised Elder attended the school NAIDOC ceremony, and the local Indigenous Community Health Service worked with the school to screen student hearing and eyesight.

Since the project, **attendance rates have improved, and the number of behaviour incidents is dropping.**

Attendance



Behavioural incidents (per week)



*<https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/reports/closing-the-gap-2018/education.html>

Over 75% of Indigenous students at the school are involved in a school project to create a Corroboree Garden with painted totems.



FAIR EDUCATION: ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

As the first educators of children, parents and carers play an essential role in setting students up for success in life. Some believe that the extent to which families engage in their child's education is the best predictor for student achievement, above socioeconomic status.



100*
schools supported



28,501*
students supported

(*These figures include Smart Giving and Fair Education projects)

Engaging students' families and the local community is key to closing the education gap and Schools Plus's Fair Education program is generating long term change by building the capacity of educators to better engage families and communities in student learning. Many of our shorter-term Smart Giving projects also focus on this, either as a key focus or enabler.

Engaging pre-schoolers in learning

With the nearest kindergarten over 50kms away, most children start school at Yelarbon State School in Queensland with no formal early learning experience. Through a Fair Education project, Yelarbon formed their own eKindy pod, allowing kindergarten aged children and their families to engage in curriculum-approved pre-school learning for two days a week; one face-to-face at the school and one via online sessions run in collaboration with the School of Distance Education.

After three years, the school reports the transition into full-time learning has been made smoother for young children, who are more familiar with the school environment, more comfortable with the school routine and have the necessary early development skills needed for successful learning. Parents and families show strengthened relationships with the school staff and community.



eKindy pod

100% of students who attended the eKindy pod are at or above benchmarks for English and Maths in Year 1.

eKindy students continue to read at or above the benchmark levels into Year 2, indicating that the early learning exposure has a direct impact on longer-term outcomes.

Developing a communication framework

Seven NSW special schools, led by Clarke Road School, have worked to better support the complex learning needs of their students, most of which have severe developmental disabilities and learn at a pre-Kindergarten level. The group believed that communicating students' learning and progress to families could be improved.

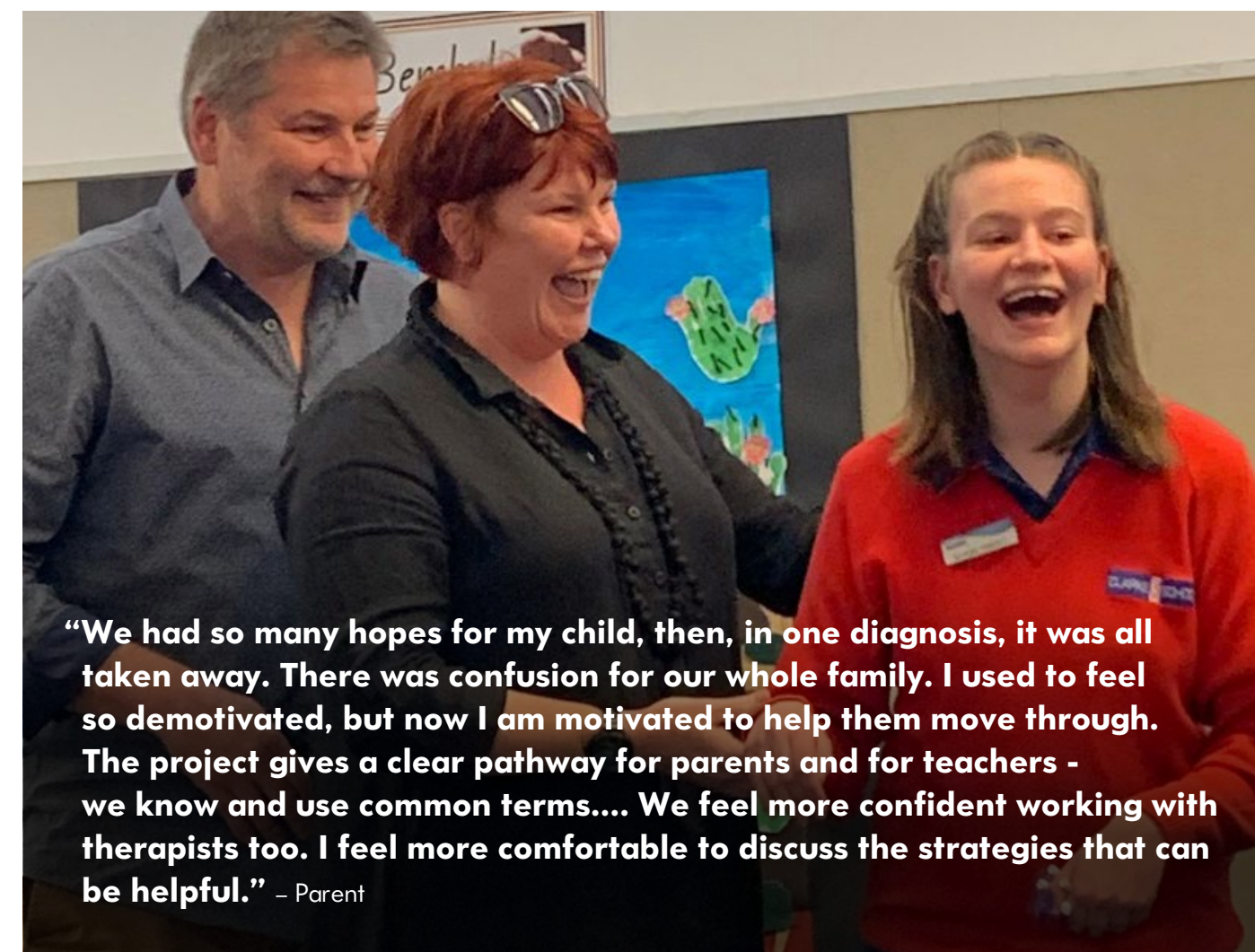
The schools developed a framework to assess students' individual communication abilities. Questions like "Can the student understand spoken words or messages?" were tracked on a seven-point scale from awareness to critical thinking. The framework meant teachers could develop lessons suitable for each student and more easily communicate this with parents, staff, and other support services.

Awareness	Anticipation	Intentional	Imitation First - Then	Categorising	Problem Solving	Critical Thinking
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Data tracked along the framework shows progression for individual students and as a cohort. Students can now engage in learning for longer periods and there has been a reduction in verbal and physical outbursts.

Systemic impact

Project leaders were approached by the NSW Department of Education, who are trialling a digitised version of the framework in more than 100 schools. The findings of the trial are expected to provide insights on assessment tools for complex learners and offer new improvement measures for young people with disability.



"We had so many hopes for my child, then, in one diagnosis, it was all taken away. There was confusion for our whole family. I used to feel so demotivated, but now I am motivated to help them move through. The project gives a clear pathway for parents and for teachers - we know and use common terms.... We feel more confident working with therapists too. I feel more comfortable to discuss the strategies that can be helpful." – Parent

COMMONWEALTH BANK TEACHING AWARDS

By shining a spotlight on great teaching practices and recognising the real value of the teaching profession, we acknowledge the pivotal role teachers play in helping to close the education gap.

The Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards are delivered in partnership with Commonwealth Bank and the Pioneers in Philanthropy, a group of high-profile business leaders and philanthropists. The Awards have now recognised 60 outstanding teachers and school leaders around Australia who are transforming the futures of their students and making an increasing impact in the education system.

Each year, the Teaching Fellowship program includes a range of professional learning experiences designed to enhance the Fellows' knowledge, leadership skills and professional opportunities so they can share their expertise and increase their influence in helping to reduce the education gap.

2,957

teachers nominated for their commitment to their students

367

applications from dedicated teachers and school leaders

12

outstanding educators rewarded

Enhanced knowledge and leadership skills

Michael Smith and the team at Marsden State High School have led impactful innovation in teacher education in Queensland. They established an Institute of Teacher Development as part of their Fellowship project in 2020/21. The training program for student and early career teachers is being shared widely and was announced as an Excellence winner and Finalist in the 2021 Australian HR Awards – the only school to feature.

Five Teaching Fellows completed PhD studies in their specialist fields.



Increased influence in the education system

Jackie Roberts presented at the Federal Government's School Stakeholder Forum on 'Closing the Gap in Education', sharing the great work being done in her school and across the NT.

Jay Page has been invited to be a member of the reference group for the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's Review on the Technologies Curriculum, in recognition of her outstanding leadership in ICT, eLearning and digital technologies.

Five Teaching Fellows were invited to meet with the Federal Education Minister's Panel on Initial Teacher Education.

Enhanced professional opportunities

In 2020, Jessica Colleu Terradas was appointed Literacy Coach in the Learning Improvement Unit in the SA Education Department to improve student literacy in SA schools. She was selected for a 2020 Churchill Fellowship to conduct further research and to scale her impact in lifting literacy outcomes for all students, especially at-risk adolescents. Jessica has been asked to present on effective classroom practice to more than 300 teachers at key education conferences including ResearchEd 2020 and Learning Difficulties Australia National Conference 2021.

Twenty Fellows were invited to present for the Curriculum Studies Association's Professional Development program.



On behalf of students and teachers across Australia, Schools Plus would like to thank all of our supporters, without whom none of these projects would have been made possible. There are many other tremendous examples of impact we were not able to showcase here. Please do get in touch if you would like to learn more about our work.



Schools Plus 

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