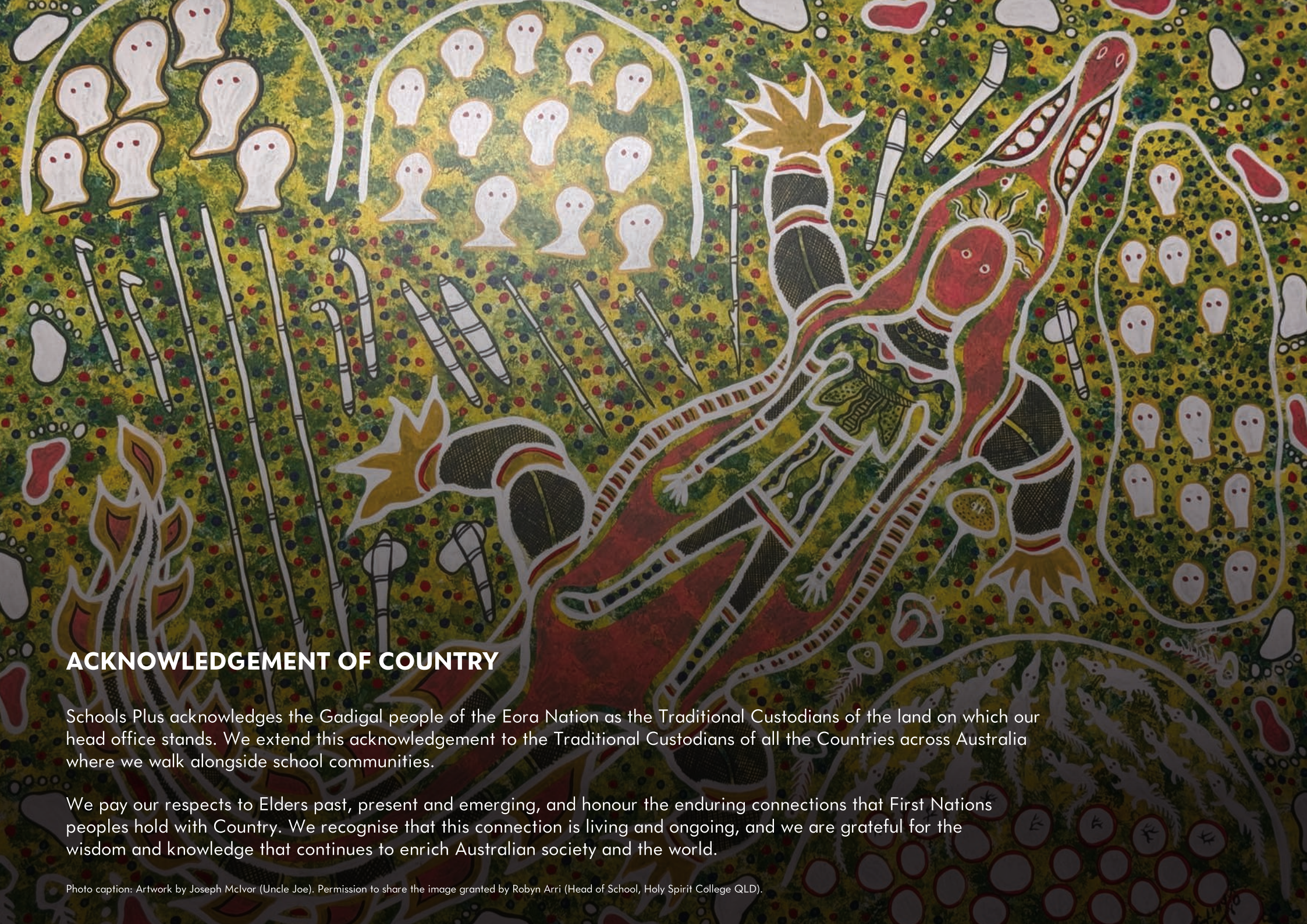


A photograph of a smiling teacher with glasses on her head, wearing a blue patterned shirt, leaning over a desk. A young student with a ponytail, wearing a green and white school uniform, is sitting at the desk and smiling at the camera. The background shows a classroom with a blue bulletin board and various educational materials.

Schools Plus 

ANNUAL REPORT
2025-2026

**A YEAR OF
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR EVERY CHILD**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Schools Plus acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our head office stands. We extend this acknowledgement to the Traditional Custodians of all the Countries across Australia where we walk alongside school communities.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and honour the enduring connections that First Nations peoples hold with Country. We recognise that this connection is living and ongoing, and we are grateful for the wisdom and knowledge that continues to enrich Australian society and the world.

Photo caption: Artwork by Joseph McIvor (Uncle Joe). Permission to share the image granted by Robyn Arri (Head of School, Holy Spirit College QLD).



INSIDE THIS REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO	4
WHO WE ARE	5
WHAT WE DO	6
IMPACT IN NUMBERS	8
INSIGHTS FROM OUR EDUCATION TEAM	10
LEARNING GAPS	12
WELLBEING	16
FIRST NATIONS	20
RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE	24
CRISIS & CLIMATE RESILIENCE	28
IMPACT PARTNERS & EDUCATION PARTNERS	32
PIONEERS IN PHILANTHROPY & BOARD DIRECTORS	33
REFERENCES	35

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Every child deserves the chance to thrive — not because of where they live, what their family earns, or the challenges or advantages they carry through the school gate. But because of who they are. Because of their potential.

This year, Schools Plus walked alongside over 300 school communities across Australia. From the remote outstation communities of the Northern Territory to the islands of the Torres Strait, from the Tasmanian Midlands to the suburbs of Western Australia. In every place, we saw the same thing: that when schools are genuinely supported, children get more opportunities to succeed at school and thrive. And that the gap between what is possible for some children and what is available to others remains one of the most urgent challenges our country faces.

We reached more than 66,000 children and over 8,400 teachers this year, and behind those numbers are stories that stay with you. Students at Joondalup Education Support Centre — children with complex learning needs — achieving 100% mastery of digital skills. Young people at Armadale Senior High School, for whom mainstream schooling wasn't working, finding a way to enjoy and engage with learning again through a practical, hands-on program. First Nations students in North Queensland, who

began the year withdrawn and uncertain, finishing it with confidence and a stronger sense of belonging. These are not small things. For these children, and for the families watching on, they are everything.

We are intentionally shifting how we work to ensure Schools Plus is an organisation that meets the real needs of children all over the country. Increasingly, our most meaningful impact comes from building solutions together with education departments and sectors, schools, and the local voices who know their students best. Sitting with school communities and sector leaders, asking what young people need and where we can make the greatest difference, and moving from there. It is slower and harder than arriving with ready-made answers. But we know it is the only way to create change that lasts, and the results are bearing that out. You will read more about this in the pages ahead.

Our commitment to lasting change extends to how we are embracing technology. Thanks to Salesforce, a decade-long partner of ours, we are building an AI agent designed to help Schools Plus work smarter and reach further. We are determined that students facing the most disadvantage won't be left behind in this next technological shift and this work will help us to do that.

None of this is possible without the people who show up for us.

We are incredibly grateful to our supporters, partners, teachers, principals and school communities who have shown up, year after year, in some of the most challenging corners of this country. Since 2014, that collective commitment has reached more than 630,000 children and young people.

We do not take that lightly. And we are not done.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrill Nixon".

Sherrill Nixon
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Schools Plus

WHO WE ARE

Schools Plus is a national driver in advancing education equity to give every child, every opportunity to thrive in school and beyond.

OUR PURPOSE

To give every child, every opportunity to thrive through school and beyond.

OUR VISION

Is that all young Australians reach their potential through access to a great education.

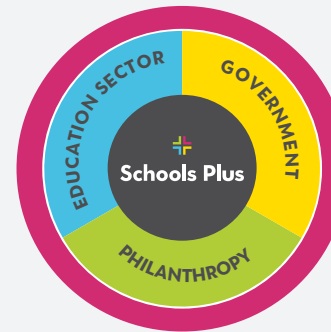
OUR MISSION

Is to facilitate sustainable change to help children facing disadvantage succeed at school.

WHAT WE DO

OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAMS

We tackle Australia's most pressing education challenges in partnership with philanthropy, government, and the education sector to drive sustainable change through five strategic programs.



Learning Gaps



Wellbeing



First Nations



Rural, Regional and Remote



Crisis & Climate Resilience

INCUBATE TO INFLUENCE FRAMEWORK

Our Incubate to Influence framework underpins our strategic programs and enables us to draw on evidence and insights from our work to influence education policy and system level change. Through this framework, we pilot and refine innovative approaches, co-design evidence-based solutions with partners and expand and scale them so that change becomes embedded and the long-term benefits reach as many young Australians as possible.





IMPACT IN NUMBERS

DURING THE 2025 SCHOOL YEAR¹, WE IMPACTED:

66,968

CHILDREN
& YOUNG
PEOPLE

8,465

TEACHERS

320

SCHOOL
COMMUNITIES



Learning Gaps

42,356 children 5,070 teachers 201 school communities



Wellbeing

22,445 children 3,365 teachers 116 school communities



First Nations

6,826 children 1,028 teachers 74 school communities



Rural, Regional & Remote

33,951 children 4,659 teachers 221 school communities



Crisis & Climate Resilience

3,601 children 457 teachers 13 school communities

OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS DONATED

\$9.5 million

In FY 2025 which has helped children, teachers and school communities across our strategic programs.

INVESTMENT IN SCHOOLS



78%

Supported schools through funding, coaching and program management



13%

Invested in fundraising to secure future support and grow our impact



9%

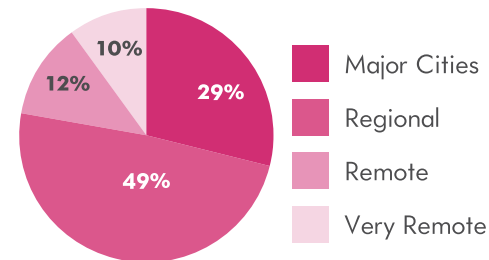
Invested in the people, systems and infrastructure that enable our work

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

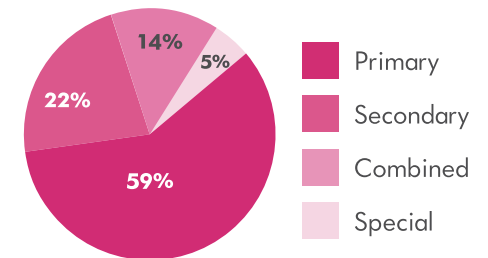
SCHOOL COMMUNITIES WE'VE SUPPORTED

98% of our school partners are in the bottom 50% of Australia's socio-educational advantage scale.²

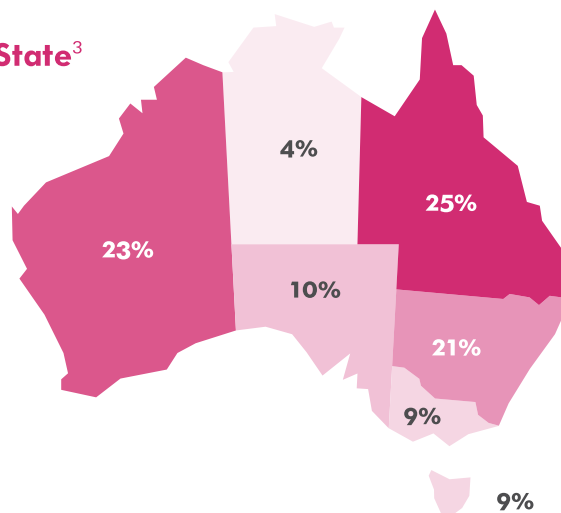
Schools by Location



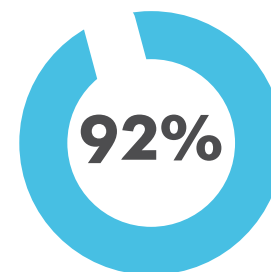
Schools by Type



Schools by State³



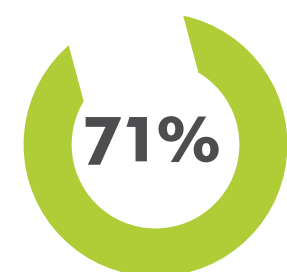
INSIGHTS FROM SCHOOL COMMUNITIES



of schools said their goals were achieved or mostly achieved



of schools said their projects had a high or very high impact on students



of schools felt to a great extent that their project outcomes would be sustained beyond Schools Plus' support

² The Index of Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) measures the socio-educational context of a school community. 1000 = national median; lower values indicate greater disadvantage.

³ Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

INSIGHTS FROM OUR EDUCATION TEAM

With your support, we are co-designing solutions reaching more children in more schools and working side by side with the communities that need us most.

We believe the best solutions for schools are built with them, not just for them. That's why our Education team has spent the past year forging genuine partnerships across education departments, school communities and local voices to ask 'what do you actually need?' — and then working together to build it.

The scale and persistence of learning gaps between students facing disadvantage and their advantaged peers in Australia points to deep structural problems that demand a system-level response. Some of our most exciting work right now is a series of co-design initiatives developed with education departments and school communities — evidence-based, community-led programs shaped by the people who know these students best.

If a child can't read by the end of Year 2, the odds begin to stack against them. That reality is driving our work with the Wambuu-Macquarie network of four schools in Dubbo, New South Wales, where many students begin Kindergarten with limited literacy foundations and socioeconomic pressures compounding the challenge from day one. Co-invested by the NSW Department of Education, the program places a dedicated coaching presence inside classrooms — working alongside teachers, building confidence in evidence-based explicit teaching, and using data to track every child's progress.

In the Hedland region, Western Australia, we're working with a network of four schools to strengthen cultural responsiveness. Embedding Aboriginal languages, perspectives and community voices into everyday school life. Local Elders and organisations including Wirraka Maya and Wangka Maya are central partners, and the network is developing a first-of-its-kind Cultural Responsiveness Audit Tool to help schools assess and grow their practice. The foundations being

laid now will shape how students experience belonging and identity for years to come.

In Shepparton, Victoria, we're partnering with Catholic Education Sandhurst to introduce a structured, tiered approach to literacy and numeracy across three schools serving communities with some of the highest levels of educational need in regional Victoria. Early screening has already identified significant gaps in oral language, decoding and numeracy. Our response introduces high-quality instruction for every student, small-group intervention for those who need more, and intensive individualised support for those furthest behind, alongside coaching and tools that give teachers a clear picture of what's working.

Sustainable change in schools requires shared ownership. When sectors, school leaders, community organisations and supporters are all invested in a solution, it makes a difference.

You make all of this possible — the travel to the Hedland region, Dubbo and Shepparton, the co-investment alongside education sectors, the bold thinking about what schools need now and into the future.

Your belief in this work changes everything. Thank you.



Alexandra Harper
Director of Education,
Schools Plus





LEARNING GAPS



THE NEED

Too many Australian children are falling behind in core learning areas of literacy, numeracy, and STEM — and children facing disadvantage are hit hardest.

These learning gaps do not arise because children have less potential. They reflect unequal access to the opportunities, resources and support that enable children to learn and thrive. Australian schools have some of the highest levels of social segregation among OECD countries, and this divide is widening, concentrating disadvantage in particular schools and communities rather than spreading opportunity evenly.⁽¹⁾

Disadvantage takes many forms. For some children, it's growing up without books or a quiet place to study, or in families stretched thin by financial and time pressures, where even the basics — enough food, stable housing, or a school uniform — can be out of reach. For others, it's living with disability or additional learning needs without the support they need to thrive. For some children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it can mean learning a new language and a new education system at the same time. And for those in regional, remote, or some First Nations communities, it can mean geographic isolation from the support and services every child deserves.

As education, employment and everyday life become increasingly shaped by technology and higher skill demands, the cost of falling behind at school continues to grow. Without equitable access to the technology, connectivity and digital capability needed to participate fully in learning, students facing disadvantage risk falling even further behind.⁽²⁾

Without early and sustained support, this divide can follow children facing disadvantage well beyond the classroom, shaping their wellbeing, earning potential and capacity to fully participate in society throughout their lives.⁽³⁾

THE REALITY FOR CHILDREN FACING DISADVANTAGE:

- There is a five-year achievement gap between 15-year-old students from the lowest and highest socioeconomic groups.⁽³⁾
- While around 1 in 3 Australian students are yet to achieve national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, this increases to around 2 in 3 for students facing disadvantage.⁽⁴⁾
- Students facing disadvantage are significantly more likely to start school behind and make slower progress.⁽⁵⁾ Of students who fall behind by Year 3, fewer than 1 in 5 ever catch up to their peers by Year 9.⁽¹⁾
- Children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, regional and remote communities, those living with disability, and First Nations children face greater barriers to digital access than their peers.⁽⁶⁾

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

Many of our students come to high school not able to read or to read well enough to engage with the curriculum or life beyond school.

Port Lincoln High School (SA)

”

“

Students have had a history of poor attendance or disengagement resulting in poor literacy and academic performance.

St Kieran's Catholic School (QLD)

”

LEARNING GAPS



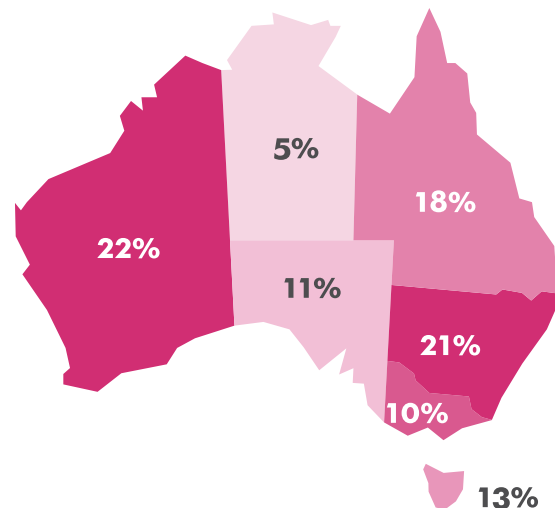
OUR IMPACT

42,356
children

5,070
teachers

201
communities

NATIONAL REACH



WHAT'S WORKING IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

A clear and step-by-step approach to teaching

Explicit instruction is teaching that's clear, structured, and intentional. It works by introducing new concepts in small, carefully explained steps, walking students through how to do something before asking them to try it themselves. An approach that aligns with how our brains naturally learn and remember.

A review by AERO (Australian Education Research Organisation) of more than 328 studies⁽⁷⁾ found it consistently improves results across reading, writing, maths, science and problem-solving at every year level, and for students of all abilities across different contexts.

We equip schools to deliver explicit, evidence-informed literacy and numeracy instruction.

Checking in as students learn

Formative assessment happens in the flow of everyday teaching — teachers checking in on understanding in the moment and adjusting what comes next. It catches misconceptions early, before they take hold, and gives both teachers and students a clearer picture of where things actually stand. It also has a direct impact on memory. When students are prompted to actively recall what they've learned, they retain it better and for longer.

An AERO review of 138 studies⁽⁷⁾ found formative assessment reliably lifts achievement across subjects and year levels, for all kinds of students.

We support teachers to use formative assessment to identify learning needs and provide timely, targeted teaching.

Digital access is now fundamental to learning. Without reliable devices, internet access and digital capability, students can struggle to participate fully in classroom learning, complete schoolwork and build the skills needed for future education and employment. We are committed to ensuring students from disadvantaged backgrounds have the technology, connectivity and digital capability they need to succeed.

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

The Explicit Teaching in Mathematics project significantly improved student learning, engagement, and confidence.

Glen William Public School cluster (NSW)

”

“

PAT Reading data demonstrates strong overall improvement in student reading outcomes.

Baler Primary School cluster (WA)

”

“

I never thought I could write something others would want to read. Now I want to write more.

Student from Coral Coast cluster (QLD)

”

LEARNING GAPS

STORIES OF CHANGE



Opening the Door to Digital Learning

Joondalup Education Support Centre, WA

At Joondalup Education Support Centre, a specialist primary school, students arrive with complex learning needs and often without the foundational physical and academic skills essential for learning. Here, every barrier carries more weight than it would anywhere else.

Staff identified a specific challenge for their students. That without the fine motor skills to control a device, digital learning was simply out of reach. In response, they built a program to teach and assess the foundational skills needed to get there — from responding to visual prompts and tracking animations, to making intentional finger movements to interact with digital content.

In 2025, 130 students moved through the program, with every single assessed student improving their digital literacy skills, including gains of up to 37% in just one term. Notably, a number of students achieved 100% mastery of all 33 digital skills, raising them up to curriculum-level standards.

"This is a significant achievement for our students due to their individualised complex learning needs." – Project Lead

Students are now applying their developed motor skills to multiple learning areas, including literacy, maths, science, and technologies — proof that when students get the specialised support they need, they can thrive.

More than Words

Port Lincoln High School, SA

Six hundred kilometres from Adelaide, Port Lincoln High School serves a remote community with significant numbers of Aboriginal students and young men requiring intensive literacy support. Many students arrive at the school unable to read well enough.

Restructuring their corrective reading approach, the school shifted from a large to small group model with targeted sessions delivered by specialist staff including a speech pathologist — giving each student focused, personalised instruction matched to their specific needs. Teachers also embedded daily reading-aloud routines into classrooms.

The results have been encouraging. *"Students are reading aloud more confidently, participating actively in class discussions, and demonstrating reduced hesitation and error rates when decoding texts."* – Project Lead

That shift in confidence is hard to overstate — for young people who have long associated reading with failure, choosing to participate is a profound step forward. Alongside these visible changes, PAT-R and NAPLAN assessments have shown growth, reflecting what teachers are seeing every day in the classroom.

The positive culture the school has built through this program is one where struggling readers are seen, supported, and given genuine reason to believe in themselves. With strong foundations now in place, this community heads into the next year of the program with real momentum and a clear sense of what works.



WELLBEING



THE NEED

Wellbeing is fundamental to learning, yet children experiencing disadvantage face disproportionate barriers that undermine both their wellbeing and their ability to engage and succeed at school.

Financial hardship, discrimination, trauma, housing instability, social isolation and unequal access to support services often overlap and affect children's mental health, sense of belonging and ability to learn.⁽⁸⁾ When a child feels safe and a sense of belonging at school, they are more likely to attend school, engage in learning and achieve academically.

Children and young people across Australia are now experiencing increasingly complex challenges affecting their wellbeing. Alongside traditional pressures like academic stress and bullying, they must navigate a shifting social and environmental landscape, influenced by digital technology, social media and climate-related uncertainty.⁽⁹⁾ These pressures can amplify social comparison, reduce self-esteem, increase exposure to bullying⁽¹⁰⁾ and contribute to poor mental health.

Mental health is one of the most significant wellbeing issues facing young Australians. Almost two in five (39%) Australians aged 16–24 experience a mental disorder — the highest prevalence of any age group and a substantial increase from 26% in 2007.⁽¹¹⁾ Nearly one in five (18%) secondary students report missing school because of anxiety, depression or another mental health condition.⁽⁹⁾ Suicide remains the leading cause of death for Australians aged 15–24⁽¹¹⁾ and the second leading cause of death among children aged 5–17.⁽¹²⁾

THE REALITY FOR CHILDREN FACING DISADVANTAGE:

- Children experiencing disadvantage are less likely to feel a sense of belonging at school. Compared with their peers, they report less positive relationships with teachers, and lower confidence in managing stress.⁽¹³⁾
- School attendance rates are lowest in regional and remote schools. Children in our most remote schools miss more than three times as many days as students in metro schools.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Children in rural and remote Australia face access barriers to primary health care and specialised mental health support due to distance, workforce shortages and limited service availability.⁽¹¹⁾
- First Nations children report higher levels of psychological distress and self-harm than non-Indigenous peers,⁽¹⁵⁾ while suicide is the leading cause of death for First Nations girls aged 5–17 and the second leading cause for boys.⁽¹⁶⁾
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face language barriers, settlement experiences and migration-related trauma that can affect help-seeking and access to culturally safe services.⁽¹¹⁾

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

Many of our students have had adverse childhood experiences and limited modelling of appropriate conflict resolution and emotional regulation skills.

Banksia Grove Primary School (WA)

”

“

Underlying student fear and anxiety presents as chronic school refusal resulting in ongoing disengagement with learning.

Brisbane Bayside State College (QLD)

”

WELLBEING



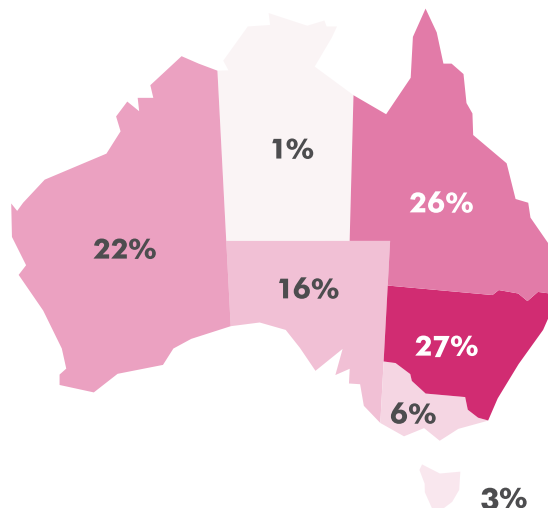
OUR IMPACT

22,445
children

3,365
teachers

116
communities

NATIONAL REACH³



3 Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

WHAT'S WORKING IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Embedding whole-school wellbeing

Creating a culture of wellbeing means making it part of everyday school life — in the relationships, culture and practices that shape every child's experience. Rather than relying on isolated programs, evidence supports a whole-school approach to student wellbeing, where wellbeing is embedded across all aspects of school life.

The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework⁽¹⁷⁾ identifies leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support as the foundations of effective school wellbeing, recognising that positive school cultures, meaningful student participation, strong partnerships with families and communities, and coordinated support help create safe, inclusive learning environments where children feel they belong. These approaches strengthen wellbeing, engagement and learning, while enabling schools to identify and respond to students' needs early.

We help schools embed sustainable, evidence-informed approaches that strengthen wellbeing across the whole school — building the leadership, culture and capability needed to support every child's learning and wellbeing.

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

Student attendance for the groups has improved. The whole school average attendance rate is 75.5%. The Year 7-8 group session attendance has been 88%. The Year 9-10 group session attendance has been 83%. Student engagement in the program has been high.

Parklands High School cluster (TAS)

”

Strengthening teacher capability

Educators play a critical role in children's wellbeing. Positive relationships with trusted adults at school are a key protective factor for children's mental health,⁽¹¹⁾ and through their everyday interactions, teachers help children feel safe, connected and supported while often being the first to recognise when additional support is needed.

As children's wellbeing needs become increasingly complex, teachers are playing an expanding role in supporting students while managing growing demands themselves. Research shows that educator wellbeing and capability help shape teacher-student relationships, classroom climate and schools' capacity to respond effectively to students' wellbeing needs.^{(17),(18)} Equipping educators with practical skills, confidence and evidence-informed approaches strengthens their ability to create safe, consistent and supportive learning environments.

We build teachers' confidence and capability to recognise, respond to and support student wellbeing through practical, evidence-informed strategies that strengthen both student outcomes and whole-school wellbeing.

“

97% reduction of suspensions - fallen from an average of 199 days per year to only 6.5 days. Over 3 years assaults on staff have decreased by 89% and assaults between students have decreased by 76%. Out of class support incidents has reduced by 95%. Termly wellbeing surveys show rising student-reported engagement and resilience. Attendance has risen from 78% (2021) to 88% (2025).

Avonvale Primary School cluster (WA)

”

WELLBEING

STORIES OF CHANGE



The Chrysalis Effect

Armadale Senior High School, WA

At Armadale Senior High School, some students face the challenge of not fitting the traditional model of schooling. School can become a place of fear, disappointment and failure. For these students mainstream schooling has stopped working, and for them the Chrysalis program is their last real option.

The Chrysalis program has brought together disengaged Year 8 and 9 students through practical, hands-on learning. Students have built garden beds, raised chickens, grown food, had real work experience with local businesses and have gone on off-site excursions every term. Their achievements have also been celebrated through photo walls, a graduation ceremony, and work that students could show their families — many for the first time.

Family connections have been an integral part of the program. Staff made weekly phone calls to families sharing positive stories about students, did home visits, and cooked meals that students took home to share. For families who had previously seen the school as a source of conflict or disappointment, these small consistent gestures rebuilt trust.

As one parent said: *“The Chrysalis program has given my son a safe haven away from the chaos of mainstream. He has the confidence to be himself. It’s the only reason he will go to school.”*

The whole school has shifted how it understands and responds to its most disengaged young people, through training staff in trauma-informed practice through the Berry Street Education Model — an evidence-based approach for working with young people carrying significant stress and instability.

Student wellbeing measures improved by 20% on average, with some individuals improving by nearly 40%. Year 9 attendance rose against the typical downward trend. Twelve students completed a VET qualification, and at graduation, every single family attended, including those who had avoided the school for years.

What began as a program for a handful of students has become a significant milestone for the school’s change journey and a demonstration that with the right conditions, even the most disengaged young people can find their way back.

Bridges to Success

Gateway Learning Community, NSW

For many Year 6 students, the leap to high school can become a source of anxiety, uncertainty, and sometimes dread. The Gateway Learning Community’s Bridges to Success program set out to change that story entirely.

Bringing together Beresfield, Thornton, Tarro, Millers Forest, Black Hill, Woodberry Learning Centre and Woodberry Public Schools with Francis Greenway High School, the program built a structured, tiered transition model that replaced the traditional single orientation day with up to 14 purposeful activities tailored to individual student needs. No student was left to navigate the transition alone. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those from the Support Unit, high potential learners, children from defence families, and students from EAL/D backgrounds all received dedicated experiences designed with them in mind.

“The Middle Years Transition is essential in bridging the gap. It not only fosters wellbeing and sense of belonging but also significantly boosts engagement, attendance, and achievement, helping every child thrive.” – Teacher

The impact of the program has been immediately visible. Teachers described something they hadn’t seen before: students expressing genuine excitement about moving to high school, returning from visits energised, having already made friends, learned their teachers’ names, and begun to picture themselves belonging there. Families felt the shift too. Through personal contact, transition meetings, and dedicated family evenings, parents became active partners in their child’s journey.

As one teacher described — *“the effect on student wellbeing has been profound. Families shared significant positive feedback about the consistent support they received, with some students — who were previously too anxious to even step onto the high school grounds — attending multiple visits with growing confidence.”*

This is year one of a three-year program, and the foundations are firmly in place with students experiencing reduced anxiety, stronger connections, and real excitement about learning. These students are starting high school with the confidence that they belong.



FIRST NATIONS



THE NEED

First Nations Australians are the custodians of the world's oldest living cultures, with enduring strengths, knowledge and identities that provide a powerful foundation for learning.

Yet the ongoing impacts of colonisation, including entrenched disadvantage and disrupted connections to Country, culture and community, continue to shape the opportunities available to many First Nations children today.⁽¹⁹⁾

Intergenerational trauma and systemic disadvantage have contributed to higher rates of mental illness, self-harm and suicide among First Nations people,⁽¹⁹⁾ as well as over-representation of First Nations children in child protection and out-of-home care.⁽²⁰⁾ Together, these factors can profoundly affect children's safety, wellbeing and development, creating complex barriers to learning and limiting opportunities to reach their full potential.

At the same time, connection to Country, culture, language and community provides a strong foundation for wellbeing, identity and learning.⁽²¹⁾ One that schools and services can recognise, strengthen and build on.

THE REALITY FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN:

- Only a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are meeting the expected developmental milestones when they start school, compared with about 55% of non-Indigenous children.⁽²²⁾
- First Nations children report higher levels of psychological distress and self-harm than non-Indigenous peers,⁽¹⁵⁾ while suicide is the leading cause of death for First Nations girls aged 5–17 and the second leading cause for boys.⁽¹⁶⁾
- In 2025, just 1 in 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attended school regularly, compared to almost 2 in 3 non-Indigenous students.⁽²³⁾
- Between 2015 and 2025, the attendance gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous students grew in every single state and territory across Australia, growing by 3 percentage points nationally.⁽²³⁾
- Around 1 in 3 First Nations students need additional support in reading (31.8%) and numeracy (32.4%), compared with fewer than 1 in 10 non-Indigenous students (8.5% and 7.8%, respectively).⁽⁴⁾
- Encouragingly, the percentage of First Nations children 'exceeding' expectations in numeracy in Years 7 and 9 has lifted in recent years, building on gains seen since 2023.⁽⁴⁾
- Around 80% of First Nations students miss out on the opportunity to learn an Indigenous language at school. Teachers recognise this and want better training and deeper understanding of Indigenous culture to help First Nations students thrive.⁽²⁴⁾



FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

Indigenous student attendance is 80.2%, 9.4% lower than non-Indigenous students at 89.6%. Chronic absenteeism is a serious issue, with 36.7% of Indigenous students attending <80% compared to 16.1% of non-Indigenous students; a 20.6% gap.

Mossman State School (QLD)

”

“

Pitjantjatjara is students' first language ... students are learning maths only through English.

Areyonga School (NT)

”

FIRST NATIONS



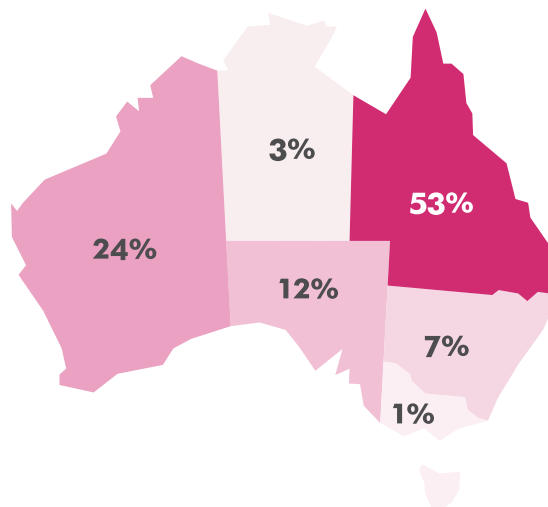
OUR IMPACT

6,826
children

1,028
teachers

74
communities

NATIONAL REACH



WHAT'S WORKING IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Culturally grounded practice

School communities need support to create culturally safe learning environments where First Nations students can thrive. That starts with recognising the importance of connection to culture, Country, language and community for wellbeing, and therefore children's capacity to learn.⁽²¹⁾ It also means approaches need to be tailored to local communities, reflecting the diversity of First Nations cultures, histories and understandings of wellbeing, while avoiding superficial or tokenistic practices.

It might mean Elders and community members co-teaching alongside classroom staff, local Indigenous languages being taught as part of the regular timetable, on Country learning days that connect science or geography to local land and water knowledge, or storytelling, art and cultural protocols embedded across subjects. When embedded authentically, these approaches create spaces where First Nations and non-Indigenous students alike can engage with local Indigenous culture, strengthening the identity of First Nations students while enriching the learning of their peers.

We support programs that embed and celebrate local Indigenous cultures, language and identity to ensure First Nations students see themselves reflected in what they learn and how they learn it.

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

Students are learning new Pitjantjatjara language to express mathematical concepts of space, location and measurement.

Areyonga School (NT)

”

First Nations-led design and decision-making

Lasting change depends on education systems being shaped by, and responsive to, First Nations people and communities themselves.

The Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) project — one of Australia's largest Indigenous-led education evaluations — is a five-year initiative launched in 2022 by the Aurora Education Foundation, tracking outcomes across 47 partner schools nationally to understand what happens when Indigenous students and families are genuinely heard, valued and supported.⁽²⁵⁾

RISE reinforces the fact that real change starts with listening. That means co-designing programs and pathways with students and families, genuinely consulting them, and letting them define what success looks like. It also means looking honestly at school communications, policies and teacher training, and removing deficit-based thinking and language.

We help schools to work alongside families, Elders and communities to shape learning that reflects local culture, knowledge and aspirations. We are committed to strengthening First Nations leadership and partnerships across our work, recognising that lasting change is led by First Nations people.

“

Student engagement and cultural participation have increased substantially, with the Bama Dance Troupe expanding. Students describe feeling “proud,” “happy,” and excited to perform. Many students highlighted the importance of cultural mentors, with one student saying he loves “doing the Wandj dance with Grandad Tuccs,” and others sharing joy in meeting new people, helping younger students paint up, and dancing in front of family.

Mossman State School (QLD)

”

FIRST NATIONS

STORIES OF CHANGE



First Language First

Laynhapuy Homelands School, NT

Scattered across the remote Top End of the Northern Territory, the nine outstation communities served by Laynhapuy Homelands School sit up to four hours from the nearest hub — small, tight-knit Yolngu communities where between 20 and 80 people call Country home. For generations, Elders have carried the languages, stories, and knowledge of this land, and the school is working hard to ensure that knowledge lives on in the classroom too.

With Elders and experienced Yolngu educators leading the way, the Indigenous Language and Culture program places Yolngu voices firmly at the heart of student learning. Each term, teachers deliver dedicated language units — resources translated into local languages and woven through other subject areas — so that culture becomes a living thread running through everything children learn.

For staff working in some of Australia's most professionally isolated environments, the program's workshops, coaching sessions, and committee meetings have built real confidence and collaboration among educators who rarely get the chance to sit in the same room. Students, in turn, are showing deeper engagement with their learning, particularly through on Country experiences.

"They demonstrated pride in cultural knowledge and showed respect for Elders, stories, and local practices. Their learning became more meaningful and relevant to their cultural development." – Project Lead & Head Teacher

Like all meaningful work, the program has had its hurdles, but the community's commitment has kept things moving. With a growing network of partners and continued support taking shape, the foundations are strong. And for Yolngu children, that is making all the difference.

People, Culture and Country

Heatley Secondary College, QLD

For many Indigenous young people, the school day can feel like it has little to do with who they are. When culture, identity, and heritage are absent from learning, the effects show up everywhere — in attendance, in confidence, in a quiet sense of not quite belonging. This program started with that reality and set out to change it.

Led by Heatley Secondary College, a cluster of 22 schools across North Queensland, Mount Isa and Doomadgee united around a shared belief: that First Nations culture and identity belong at the centre of every young person's education.

Around 270 students were given opportunities most had never encountered before — designing wearable art rooted in First Nations storytelling, stepping in front of cameras as models and behind them as stylists, walking runways before large live audiences, and some students travelling to Brisbane for a cultural workshop on Minjerribah and visits to QUT and TAFE fashion precincts. Working alongside guest artist Tamika Grant-Iramu, they saw what it looks like to build a life through culture and creativity.

The impact ran deep and the data reflects it. The proportion of students reporting high cultural knowledge grew from 31% to 44%, while those reporting low cultural knowledge nearly disappeared. Students who began the year fearful and withdrawn, finishing it with confidence and a genuine sense of belonging. *"At first I felt shame, but over time I felt confident,"* one student reflected. *"Working together helped me talk more."* Others spoke of overcoming fear, feeling included, and discovering a sense of ownership in their work that many had never experienced before.

This initiative has thrived because of the partners who believe in it — among them Arts Queensland, Townsville City Council, Queensland Museum Tropics, TAFE Queensland, and Mount Isa Regional Art Gallery. The program is set to expand over the coming year across 24 schools, with new exhibitions and a feature at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair's Fashion Show. For these communities, the story is only just beginning.



RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE



THE NEED

Rural, regional and remote communities are home to some of the country's most resilient and resourceful young people.

However distance, lower population density, and higher service delivery costs set these communities apart from our major cities, shaping children's opportunities to learn, thrive and succeed.

Schools can be hundreds of kilometres from major centres, making it harder to recruit teachers, access specialist services and offer the same breadth of learning opportunities available in metropolitan schools. High teacher turnover, shortages of specialist teachers and greater reliance on early career teachers can make it harder to provide consistent, high-quality learning experiences for every student.⁽²⁶⁾

Beyond the classroom, distance can also restrict children's access to extracurricular, cultural and sporting activities that enrich learning and support healthy development. Many rural and remote communities also have fewer local employment opportunities and post-school pathways, contributing to lower average household incomes and additional barriers to children's learning and future opportunities.⁽²⁶⁾

THE REALITY FOR CHILDREN IN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES:

- Around 1 in 4 students in very remote schools achieve national benchmarks in reading and numeracy, compared with around 7 in 10 in major cities.⁽⁴⁾
- School attendance rates are lowest in regional and remote schools. Children in our most remote schools miss more than three times as many days as students in metro schools.⁽¹⁴⁾
- Regional and remote students are less likely to be developmentally on track when they start school,⁽⁵⁾ and less likely to finish Year 12.⁽²⁷⁾
- Children often have limited access to the specialist services, reliable digital connectivity, learning resources, and extracurricular, cultural and sporting opportunities that support learning, wellbeing and healthy development.⁽²⁶⁾
- Students may face long, costly commutes or even need to relocate entirely to access school.⁽²⁶⁾

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

The communities are isolated and rely heavily on the rotational rosters of employees of the mines.

Opportunities for children with disabilities is very minimal as is the level of extra-curricular activities.

Scottville/Collinsville Cluster (QLD)

”

“

We have 20% of students with undiagnosed speech issues, alongside an additional 20% of students [with] a diagnosed speech disorder, with less than half receiving support from a speech therapist.

Picton Public School (NSW)

”

RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE



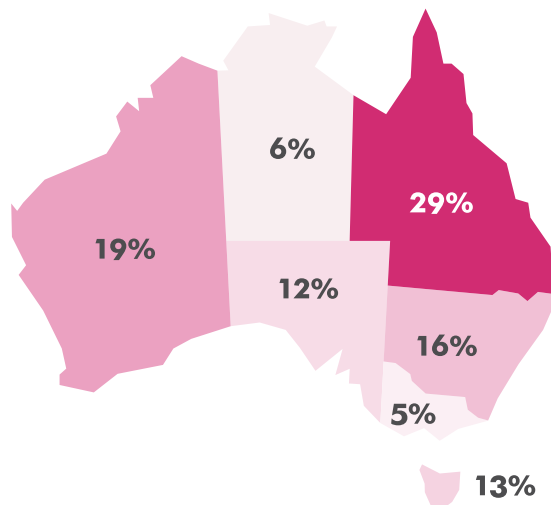
OUR IMPACT

33,951
children

4,659
teachers

221
communities

NATIONAL REACH



WHAT'S WORKING FOR RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Online access to specialist subjects and teachers

Giving children and young people in rural, regional and remote communities real-time online access to specialist subjects and teachers they would otherwise not be able to reach, is a practical way of ensuring these students don't miss out on specialist learning — provided students are supported with access to secure digital device devices and reliable internet connectivity. This also enables students to engage with teachers and classmates live, which can support the wellbeing of students who are unable to physically attend class.⁽¹⁾

We help schools invest in the technology and connectivity that expand access to learning opportunities.

School partnerships and professional networks

Sharing resources and expertise through school partnerships and professional networks, so rural, regional and remote teachers aren't working in isolation, is critical to optimising learning opportunities in these communities. This is especially important when it comes to connecting teachers with mentors who have lived experience in rural, regional and remote settings, and professional development that strengthens the local teaching workforce over time.

The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System⁽¹⁾ identified a clear need for more innovative models that pool resources and expertise across schools and systems, so students can benefit from a stronger, better supported teaching workforce, regardless of where they're located.

We support schools to build professional networks that connect teachers to expertise, mentoring and peer support beyond their school gates.

FROM OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS:

“

There has been a whole-school shift in STEM culture at Malanda State School. With access to 3D printers, new AI tools, and an organised, engaging STEM space, students now participate in cutting-edge, hands-on learning that has significantly boosted their confidence, creativity, and interest in technology. The dedicated time provided for the STEM teacher to deepen expertise and share this knowledge with colleagues has strengthened staff capability and collaboration, leading to more technology-rich learning experiences across classrooms.

Malanda State School (QLD)

”

“

The Explicit Teaching project has had a significant and positive impact across the Hunter Network, with schools reporting strengthened instructional practices, improved teacher confidence, and a clear collective direction. A key outcome of the project has been the increased alignment across schools, with leaders noting the visible 'movement of an entire network' working toward shared, evidence-based instructional approaches.

Glen William Public School cluster (NSW)

”

RURAL, REGIONAL & REMOTE STORIES OF CHANGE



Strengthening Literacy Outcomes

Tagai State College, QLD

Across 49,000 square kilometres of the Torres Strait, something meaningful is taking shape. Tagai State College is no ordinary school. It spans an entire nation, bringing together five distinct language groups across 17 campuses scattered across remote island communities. A setting where culture and language are woven into the fabric of daily life, yet where distance and high staff turnover have long made consistent, quality education hard to sustain.

Tagai State College developed the Tagai Literacy System to provide a consistent, evidence informed approach to literacy instruction across its 16 primary campuses. The system focuses on structured literacy blocks, the use of targeted reading and spelling data to inform teaching, and classroom practices that honour and build upon students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Designed to support diverse learners across the Torres Strait, the system aims to strengthen teacher practice, improve consistency in literacy instruction, and enhance student outcomes.

To support the implementation of the Tagai Literacy System, Tagai State College developed a Literacy Audit tool to monitor and track implementation across campuses. The literacy team visited each campus to conduct the audits, provide targeted reports, and work alongside campus staff to develop action plans that identified priorities for ongoing improvement within the literacy system. This process has strengthened consistency in literacy practices across the college's 16 primary campuses, with implementation rates increasing from 61% in 2025 to 81% in 2026. Over the past two years, students have demonstrated noticeable growth across literacy stages, with this progress now beginning to be reflected in A-E achievement data and contributing to the ongoing work of closing the gap in educational outcomes for students across the Torres Strait.

Classroom environments have transformed too — a meaningful shift in student behaviour, with far fewer serious incidents and a growing sense of calm giving students the space to focus on learning.

Sharing their learnings with the Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Council and the Batchelor Institute, the school has ensured that the foundations of this work only deepen over time. And the students are showing us exactly why that makes all the difference.

Reading the Future and Refusing to be left behind

Bagdad Primary School, TAS

Across a cluster of four rural schools nestled in Tasmania's Midlands — Bagdad Primary, Kempton Primary, Oatlands District, and Bothwell District — children who might once have struggled to keep pace with their peers are now arriving at reading milestones with greater confidence and speed.

Prep to Year 2 students lifted their mean PAT Reading scores from 75.5 to 88.4 — surpassing the target set for the year. For Years 1–6, the proportion of students achieving medium or high growth jumped from 68% to 77%, with overall achievement rising from 69% to 72%.

"This work in the early years will set students up for future success." – Principal

Behind this shift in reading outcomes, is a shift in how these schools have chosen to invest in their middle leaders. Classroom teachers, stepping into broader roles across all four schools, have worked together to plan structured learning sequences built around explicit teaching of phonics, fluency, and comprehension. Meeting with principals each term, the leaders also planned collaboratively, reviewed data, and reflected honestly on what was working and what needed adjusting in their classrooms. Additionally, they've opened their classroom doors to each other — observing practice, exchanging feedback and building the kind of professional trust that takes time to grow, but changes everything when it does.

Attracting national attention, two leaders presented at the 2025 AATE/ALEA national literacy conference in Hobart, sharing their ways of working and subsequent impact on student learning.

And the work is far from finished. With new leaders stepping up across each school and continued investment in coaching and professional learning, the schools are building something designed to last, to keep improving outcomes for the children who need it most.



CRISIS & CLIMATE RESILIENCE



THE NEED

For thousands of Australian children, climate change is now a lived disruption to their learning and wellbeing.

The impacts of climate change extend across children's education, from early learning through to school. In 2025 alone, floods, fires and cyclones forced one in six early childhood education and care services to close, resulting in more than 11,000 closure days and an estimated 800,000 days of lost early learning across Australia.⁽²⁸⁾

The same pattern continues throughout the school years. Two in three Australian schools are now at high risk from climate disasters.⁽²⁹⁾ Heatwaves, flood, bushfires and cyclones are increasingly interrupting learning and routine and often recur in the same communities — placing the greatest strain on those with the least capacity to recover and compounding existing disadvantage. Repeated climate disasters can lead to trauma, displacement and increased financial hardship, significantly undermining children's learning and wellbeing.⁽³⁰⁾

Climate change is also shaping how young people feel about the future. Young Australians currently rank climate change and the environment among Australia's top three national issues.⁽⁹⁾ Growing awareness of the climate crisis may also be contributing to rising anxiety among children, affecting their mental health and sense of safety.⁽³¹⁾



THE REALITY FOR CHILDREN FACING DISADVANTAGE:

- Children attending schools in disadvantaged communities face greater climate risk. Over 80% of the most disadvantaged schools are at significant risk from bushfires and floods, compared with 60% of the most advantaged.⁽²⁹⁾
- Australia's 10 highest-risk schools for bushfires and floods are all government schools in low-income communities.⁽²⁹⁾
- Children in remote communities, including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, are among the most exposed to the impacts of climate change. Geographic isolation, ageing infrastructure, and long-standing disadvantage mean these communities often have fewer resources to prepare for and recover from extreme weather events.⁽³⁰⁾

CRISIS & CLIMATE RESILIENCE



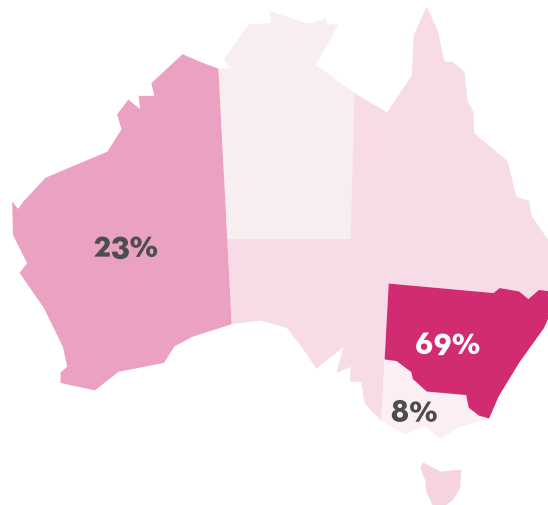
OUR IMPACT

3,601
children

457
teachers

13
communities

NATIONAL REACH



WHAT'S WORKING IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Building trauma-informed school communities

Trauma-informed practice gives schools a consistent, evidence-based way to support children before, during and after a climate disaster by rebuilding safety, trust and routine.⁽³²⁾ This includes predictable classroom routines, strategies that help students regulate their emotions, and staff equipped to recognise and respond to trauma with empathy and consistency.

Schools often draw on whole-school frameworks such as the Berry Street Education Model to embed these practices.

We help schools embed trauma-informed practice, so students affected by trauma and adversity experience the safety, stability and support they need to keep learning.

Engaging families to enhance student learning

Family engagement is one of the strongest, most consistent levers for improving student learning and wellbeing,⁽³³⁾ and it matters even more for children whose education has been disrupted by crisis or disadvantage. When a crisis disrupts a community, the connection between families and schools can be shaken, just as families and schools need each other most to help children recover and re-engage with learning.

Effective family engagement recognises the diverse strengths, needs and aspirations of families.⁽³⁴⁾ It means adapting engagement approaches, involving families as genuine partners in learning, and working together to address challenges.

We strengthen schools' capability to build genuine partnerships with families to help children affected by crisis or disadvantage stay engaged in learning.

Research shows that prioritising support for schools and early learning services in high-risk and disadvantaged communities is critical to reducing learning disruption and strengthening resilience before, during and after climate-related disasters.⁽²⁸⁾

CRISIS & CLIMATE RESILIENCE

STORIES OF CHANGE



The Parent Cafe

St Mary's Public School, NSW

The St Marys community has faced a lot. Four schools. Families navigating deep disadvantage. Then COVID hit, severing connections between parents and schools at exactly the wrong moment. Students came back more vulnerable, arriving with developmental delays and poor social-emotional health. Early warning signs for the struggles ahead. Schools knew parent engagement was the missing piece. But trust, in communities that have every reason to distrust systems, doesn't come easily.

Parent Cafe changed that. Led by St Mary's Public School, the program is peer-led. Parents set the agenda and talk about what's actually hard. That's it. And it works.

"We had a few new faces and some regular attendees return. It was a great cafe — some tears shed, lots of laughs, and some new connections made." – Parent Host

In 2025, the second year of the program, 23 cafes brought together 252 parents. Twelve are now trained table hosts. Across the program, over 750 students have been reached. At one school, students whose parents attend are 22% more likely to walk into class ready to learn, show 16% better attendance, and self-advocate four times more often. Across all schools, 85% start the day in the top two readiness-to-learn bands.

"When parents feel heard, students mirror that sense of safety and belonging – becoming more receptive learners" — Deputy Principal

Now in its third year, Parent Cafe's learnings are reaching the NSW Department of Education, as the evidence is there. When families feel safe, children are ready to learn.



IMPACT PARTNERS



EDUCATION PARTNERS

We also acknowledge our valued education partners — Australian Independent Schools, Catholic Education authorities, and Government Education Departments across Australia — whose commitment is fundamental to driving equity and opportunity for all students.

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Our Pioneers in Philanthropy are a group of Australia's most distinguished business leaders and philanthropists, united in their commitment to giving all children the opportunity to thrive in school and beyond.

For over a decade, their generosity and influence have enabled Schools Plus to drive meaningful change across thousands of Australian schools, including through the Schools Plus Teaching Awards.



David Gonski AC
Chair of the Pioneers in Philanthropy

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**EVERY CHILD HAS THE
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