

Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese

Closing the Gap Report 2026



Catholic Schools
Parramatta Diocese





Preface

Education has the power to transform lives, strengthen communities and create opportunities for future generations. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, culturally responsive education is fundamental to fostering a strong sense of identity, belonging and achievement while supporting lifelong learning and success beyond school.

Over the past year, Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD) has strengthened its commitment to improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people through significant initiatives, including the introduction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student School Fee Offering and the implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan. Together, these initiatives reflect our belief that every child should have equitable access to a high-quality Catholic education where culture is recognised, celebrated and embedded in school life. They demonstrate our commitment to removing barriers to participation, strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and creating environments where all students can thrive.

This commitment is reflected in growing enrolments across our schools in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, with more than 1,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students now choosing a Catholic education with CSPD. The continued growth in enrolments is an encouraging sign of the confidence families place in our schools and reinforces our responsibility to provide culturally safe, inclusive and academically excellent learning opportunities. It is also reflected in improved educational outcomes, with more students completing Year 12 and the number achieving HSC Bands 5 and 6 more than doubling over the past five years.

The Closing the Gap Report remains a cornerstone of CSPD's commitment to reconciliation and accountability. Producing this report each year is one of the commitments we have made through our reconciliation journey and demonstrates our determination to measure progress, identify opportunities for improvement and share the impact of our work. It provides an overview of the initiatives, partnerships and strategies implemented across our schools to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, with a focus on educational engagement, achievement, wellbeing and pathways beyond school.

While education is our core mission, we recognise that schools contribute to broader social outcomes. This report highlights how our work aligns with the priorities of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by supporting improved educational outcomes, wellbeing, cultural identity and community connection. It acknowledges the importance of strong partnerships with families, communities and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Central to this report is a strengths-based approach that celebrates the knowledge, resilience, cultures and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities. Through culturally responsive teaching, targeted wellbeing initiatives and authentic partnerships, CSPD continues to build learning environments where students feel seen, valued and empowered to succeed. This work reflects the priorities of the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Innovate RAP 2025-2027 and our commitment to improving equity and opportunity.

As we reflect on another year of progress, we recognise that Closing the Gap is an ongoing journey requiring sustained commitment, collaboration and continuous learning. CSPD remains committed to listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, strengthening partnerships and continually improving our practice as we work towards our vision to enrich the lives of students through education grounded in excellence, inclusivity and Catholic tradition.



Jack de Groot
Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese



Acknowledgement of Country

Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese acknowledges the Dharug and the Gundungurra people who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains, people who have loved and cared for this Land for thousands of years.

We pay our respects to Dharug and Gundungurra Elders, both past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this report, we use various terms when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Specifically, we use 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people' (where "and/or" acknowledges individuals who belong to both groups) interchangeably with 'Indigenous'. However, we recognise that this approach is not without contention.

These terms do not fully reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. Many individuals prefer to be identified by their specific group or clan names, while others prefer 'First Nations'. Additionally, some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people dislike the term 'Indigenous', as it is often used as a broad government classification that may not fully capture their identities.

Wherever possible, we have explicitly used 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' or 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people'. However, for brevity, we have at times used 'Indigenous' or 'First Nations'. We acknowledge that language is deeply personal and evolving, and we sincerely apologise for any offence this may cause. Our intention is always to be respectful and inclusive.



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Introduction

Through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (henceforth the National Agreement), Australian Governments and the Coalition of Peaks have committed to working together in genuine partnership to overcome inequality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. As a critical policy framework, the National Agreement ensures Governments can collaborate productively with First Nations peoples so they can achieve life outcomes equal to those of all Australians (Closing the Gap, n.d.). Alongside four Priority Reforms to inform and transform how Governments work with Indigenous communities, the Agreement sets out 19 socio-economic targets across 17 outcome areas, each shaping the wellbeing and broader life opportunities of First Nations peoples.

The responsibility for closing the gap, however, does not rest solely with Australian Governments and Coalition of Peaks partners. Evidence continues to show that progress is uneven across jurisdictions and too slow across several targets, while conditions are, in fact, worsening in some socio-economic targets (Productivity Commission, 2024, 2025). It is clear, then, that achieving the ambitions requires collective effort from all sectors of Australian society. Every organisation, institution and community has a role in addressing the structural and historical drivers of inequality and in supporting initiatives that advance empowerment, self-determination and long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As a leading non-government education provider, we, at Catholic Schools Parramatta Diocese (CSPD), are taking purposeful action to support Australia's shared commitment to closing the gap. While our core mandate is education, our identity as a Catholic organisation drives us to contribute more broadly. With deep respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we have built strong relationships with communities across Western Sydney. In partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled and other organisations, and guided by culturally grounded practice, we

seek opportunities to strengthen outcomes in wellbeing, employment, digital inclusion, justice and cultural identity, in addition to educating the next generations of First Nations peoples in the region. We are holding ourselves accountable to this commitment.

Since releasing our first Closing the Gap Report in March 2025, we have advanced our reconciliation journey with the launch of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This is a formalised, strategic document outlining CSPD's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations. An annual CSPD Closing the Gap Report is a key deliverable of the RAP, placing us among the few Australian organisations to take this bold and transparent step. In this second edition, we celebrate the achievements, strengths and resilience of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families across all 80 CSPD schools in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. While the 2026 Report highlights programs and initiatives from only a selection of our schools and teams, every school and team is contributing to this strategic commitment.

In this *Closing the Gap Report 2026*, we present a detailed account of how our schools, teams and system-wide initiatives are contributing to the National Agreement's socio-economic targets. The report is organised into seven chapters: health and wellbeing, education and early years development, employment and economic development, housing and infrastructure, access to justice, families and kin, and connection to Country, culture and languages. This framework is borrowed from the *Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2025 Annual Report and 2026 Implementation Plan*, although our report does not cover all 19 targets and 17 outcomes. Together, the chapters highlight the efforts of First Nations students and families and the culturally grounded practices across CSPD that strengthen identity, belonging, economic prosperity and long-term opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Chapter 1

Health and Wellbeing

Socio-economic Outcomes 1, 2 and 14

Across our organisation, schools and teams strengthen First Nations students' social, emotional and cultural wellbeing through culturally grounded practices, partnerships with Elders and community organisations, trauma-aware approaches and initiatives that build identity, belonging and cultural safety. These actions reflect our shared understanding that health and wellbeing are inseparable from culture, connection and community, as articulated in Outcomes 1, 2 and 14 of the National Agreement.

Through initiatives such as Yarning Circles, cultural workshops, therapeutic case management, cultural visibility and Personalised Cultural Pathways (PCPs), our teams contribute to a coherent, strengths-based approach centred on First Nations voices, relationships and community, supporting students' identity, belonging and emotional wellbeing. These efforts are already strengthening wellbeing outcomes across the system.

Initiatives and Actions

Partnerships with Elders, Organisations and Community

Partnerships with Aboriginal Elders and community-controlled organisations remain central to wellbeing practice across schools including St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Matthew's Primary Windsor, Xavier College Llandilo and St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, as well as Emmaus Catholic College Kemps Creek, St Clare's Catholic High School Hassall Grove, Marian Catholic College Kenthurst, St Columba's Catholic College Springwood, Catherine McAuley Westmead and CathWest Innovation College. These relationships provide cultural authority and continuity, ensuring students see their identities and histories reflected in the adults who guide them.

Engagement with Jarara Cultural Centre, Kimberwalli, Dalmarri artists and Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation deepens cultural connection. Elders offer cultural guidance, Welcome to Country and other cultural practices that reinforce cultural safety. The CSPD Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO) strengthens trust with families and supports social and emotional wellbeing.

In the spirit of the National Agreement's Priority Reforms, CSPD is also committed to ensuring First Nations voices are appropriately represented in the governance and implementation of our Innovate RAP. Of the 10 members of our RAP Advisory Committee, five members, with internal and external representation, identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Making First Nations representation a major RAP deliverable helps to provide important guidance and insight throughout the implementation, ensuring initiatives are culturally informed, meaningful and aligned with the experiences and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Cultural Spaces, Visibility and Practices

Culturally grounded spaces and visible cultural expressions across several schools enhance students' sense of safety and belonging. Yarning Circles at St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill and St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, along with Emmaus Catholic College Kemps Creek's cultural workshops, provide familiar environments that support student voice, wellbeing conversations and emotional expression.



Murals, artwork and language at St Matthew's Primary Windsor and CathWest Innovation College affirm cultural identity, while St Columba's Catholic College Springwood's Ngurra building highlights the deep connection to Country. Cultural practices such as smoking ceremonies and water blessings at St Agnes and Marian Catholic College Kenthurst maintain cultural continuity and grounding.

Mentoring, Cultural Groups and Student-Led Cultural Expression

Mentoring and cultural leadership opportunities across schools strengthen cultural identity and student voice. The Birraygal Boys Program at St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, Holy Family Primary Emerton, Holy Family Primary Luddenham, St Monica's Primary Richmond, St Francis of Assisi Primary Glendenning and Corpus Christi Primary Cranebrook supports cultural identity formation and emotional development.

At St Matthew's Primary Windsor, students lead Acknowledgement of Country in their own words and in Darug language, building cultural voice and pride. Student-led creative projects at CathWest Innovation College, including murals and message sticks, foster cultural expression. With guidance from Jarara and Student Support, students participate in Murama and the Rangers Program (see Chapter 7 for further information about these programs), strengthening cultural engagement.

Trauma-Aware, Holistic and Therapeutic Wellbeing Support

Student Support teams utilise trauma-aware, therapeutic approaches to strengthen emotional wellbeing. Trauma-informed training helps staff understand the impacts of trauma on behaviour, learning and regulation. Marian Catholic College Kenthurst is an example of a school taking this approach.

Jarara and Student Support teams offer therapeutic support and advocacy for cultural and emotional needs and collaborate with local Aboriginal organisations to deliver wraparound support. For example, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (currently 36) use the Attendance Team's Up and Go Bus Service, which supports families in transporting students with persistent attendance challenges to attend school by minibus and provides the children with breakfast on the go.

Communication, Family Engagement and Relational Support

Strong First Nations family engagement across St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, St Columba's Catholic College Springwood and other schools builds trust and shared responsibility for wellbeing. St Clare's Catholic High School Hassall Grove, St Francis of Assisi Primary Glendenning and St Joseph's Primary Kingswood work closely with families through the FLO and school leadership to ensure culturally safe communication and early wellbeing support. Teams involve families in cultural pathway planning and case management. At St Matthew's Primary Windsor, family yarns through Cultural Pathway Plans help deepen cultural connection and strengthen relational trust.

Staff Cultural Capability and Wellbeing

The Jarara Wellbeing Immersion Day in December 2025 strengthened staff cultural capability through weaving, kinship and cultural heritage sessions, alongside presentations on intergenerational trauma. These experiences enhanced understanding of cultural identity, cultural load and the realities faced by First Nations students and families, improving staff capacity to create culturally safe environments.

Deep Listening and Reflective Practice

At the "Better Together" symposium in October 2025, a session led by the Jarara Cultural Centre introduced *Dadirri*, meaning "inner deep listening and quiet still awareness". The concept of *Dadirri* is drawn from Ngangiwumirr culture and has been championed by Catholic education icon and Elder Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann AM. *Dadirri* is about fostering reflective, patient and culturally respectful engagement. This practice helps staff listen deeply and respond to students with cultural sensitivity, guiding culturally respectful support for their emotional needs, identities and sense of safety.

Cultural Pathways and Expanded Wellbeing Support

With more than 1,400 identified students, the Jarara team works to connect regularly with every First Nations student. PCPs identify strengths, aspirations, challenges and cultural connections. Group yarns allow students to share stories and express cultural needs.

In 2025, Jarara expanded wellbeing support, responding to a wide range of requests. These included family liaison, educational advocacy, careers guidance, culturally safe responses to racism and bullying, and assistance with basic needs such as food and housing.

Embedding Cultural Learning

In 2026, as an Innovate RAP deliverable, CSPD commenced development of an organisation-wide Cultural Learning Strategy to establish a consistent and sustainable approach to building cultural capability and strengthening cultural safety across our system. This initiative is crucial to creating an inclusive environment that supports the wellbeing of First Nations staff and students.

CSPD has partnered with Aboriginal-owned consultancy Ngurra Advisory to lead this work, recognising the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, knowledge and lived experience. Working alongside First Nations consultants ensures the strategy is grounded in First Nations perspectives, reflects best practice and aligns with culturally safe approaches to learning.

The Cultural Learning Strategy embeds cultural learning as an ongoing organisational responsibility and supports staff to develop culturally responsive practices that strengthen cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, families and communities.

Uplifting People Focused Policies and Procedures

As part of our RAP deliverables, CSPD has again partnered with Ngurra Advisory to review people-focused policies and procedures through a cultural lens. This work is underway and aims to identify opportunities to strengthen cultural safety, improve inclusivity and ensure organisational policies appropriately support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working at our organisation. We are confident that this initiative will enhance their social and cultural wellbeing.

Acknowledging Important Dates on the First Nations Calendar

CSPD recognises and acknowledges significant dates on the First Nations calendar as an important way to promote inclusivity, awareness, reflection and learning across the

organisation. Activities include inviting external leaders to speak at our quarterly Support Teams (non-school based staff) meetings, hosting morning and afternoon teas, as well as partnering with the NRL to host a breakfast at one of our schools. This initiative is also one of the key deliverables of our Innovate RAP.

Impact and Outcomes

Strengthened Cultural Safety, Identity and Belonging

Students experience stronger cultural safety, identity and belonging, reflected in greater comfort, pride and connection to place. Cultural symbols, language and artwork provide affirmation, while spaces such as St Columba's Catholic College Springwood's Ngurra reinforce belonging. PCPs further strengthen identity by ensuring each student's cultural story is recognised and reflected in their school experience.

The combined impact of the development of a Cultural Learning Strategy, uplift in our people-focused policies and procedures, and recognition of important dates on the First Nations calendar lays the foundations to shift the organisation from culturally aware to culturally responsive, capable and safe. These outcomes support an inclusive workplace where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and prospective staff, are empowered to thrive. Further, these

efforts enable all CSPD employees to contribute to a culture of respect, understanding and reconciliation more broadly.

Enhanced Emotional Wellbeing, Confidence and Resilience

Students show stronger emotional wellbeing, confidence and resilience through mentoring, cultural leadership and trauma-aware support. Cultural roles and creative contributions build pride, while trauma-aware approaches help students manage complex challenges. Staff immersion and reflective practice further strengthen the emotional environment through deeper cultural understanding.

Improved Relationships, Trust and Community Connection

Relationships between students, families, Elders and staff have strengthened, deepening trust and community connection. Families reported greater confidence through culturally grounded engagement, facilitated by the Jarara team, FLO and relational support teams. PCPs reinforce this trust by ensuring student voices are heard respectfully, supporting emotional security and sustained belonging.

Increased Access to Culturally Informed Support Services

Students now have more consistent access to culturally informed wellbeing services, strengthening emotional stability and safety. Liaison support connects students with specialist CSPD Support Teams, in addition to external health and community services, while coordinated wraparound responses further support social, emotional and cultural needs. Expanded support from Jarara further improves access to culturally safe services with a flow-on impact on wellbeing.

Greater Readiness for Learning and Future Pathways

Students show improved readiness for learning through culturally safe environments and wellbeing supports that build confidence, identity and emotional balance. Cultural engagement with Jarara strengthens belonging and future aspirations, while the Up and Go Bus Service provides a calm, reliable start that supports emotional regulation. Pathways support further builds long-term educational confidence and stability.



Chapter 2

Education and Early Years Development

Socio-economic Outcomes 3, 4, 5 and 6

Education and early years development are central to the long-term wellbeing, identity and life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Outcomes 3 and 4 of the National Agreement emphasise access to high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education, while Outcomes 5 and 6 extend this across schooling to ensure students achieve their full learning potential and progress into further education. As a leading Kindergarten to Year 12 (K–12) provider, these outcomes guide our work.

Across our schools and teams, culturally responsive practice, targeted support, strong family partnerships and collaboration with Jarara strengthen engagement, attendance, wellbeing and post-school readiness. These approaches build culturally safe environments, embed First Nations perspectives and provide tailored support that enhances learning outcomes, identity development and pathways into further education, training and employment.

Initiatives and Actions

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Environments

Our schools, including St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Matthew's Primary Windsor, St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, Marian Catholic College Kenthurst and St Columba's Catholic College Springwood, demonstrate a strong commitment to embedding Aboriginal perspectives across teaching and learning. For example, at St Joseph's, the Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO) collaborates with teachers to integrate First Nations perspectives in age-appropriate ways that help students see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

The Leading Teacher of Jarara works alongside curriculum specialists on the new National Curriculum in writing units that embed culturally appropriate pedagogy across Key Learning Areas. This work is pivotal to supporting staff in schools to build confidence in addressing their obligations under the new reforms.

St Agnes strengthens culturally responsive teaching through staff learning and the use of

cultural spaces such as the Yarning Circle and cultural classroom. St Matthew's incorporates Indigenous perspectives into curriculum delivery, supporting students to connect learning with culture and identity, while St Luke's embeds cultural learning through artwork, storytelling and Elder partnerships.

At Marian Catholic College, workshops and cross-school cultural learning facilitate cultural engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Early Engagement, Attendance and Wellbeing Support

Several initiatives strengthen early engagement and culturally grounded foundations for learning across our schools. At St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, for example, the FLO supports early cultural identity formation through storytelling, hands-on activities and cultural discussions. The Up and Go Bus Service ensures young children attend school consistently and arrive ready to learn, providing a culturally safe, reliable start to the day and supporting positive learning environments.

The specialist Attendance team plays a significant role in stabilising attendance and strengthening engagement, while the specialist Behaviour team offers therapeutic and case management support that reinforces attendance. The Jarara team makes targeted phone calls to families of Year 5 students to help secure timely Year 7 enrolments and accompanies them throughout the year so they can remain consistently engaged.

Working with Jarara and the FLO to ensure culturally responsive planning, the Attendance team also provides individualised assistance to address attendance barriers and supports schools with procedures, enrolment processes and complex cases. They assist families with school selection, documentation and transition planning. The attendance rate for First Nations students remained relatively stable in 2025 at 87.5%, reflecting the impact of these collaborative efforts.

However, despite these gains, the 4.3% attendance gap compared with non-Indigenous students persists. This points to the need to consider additional approaches to drive continuous improvement alongside sustained culturally grounded strategies, strong family partnerships and early intervention to strengthen engagement, resilience and readiness for learning.

Support for First Nations Students with Disability

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with diagnosed or imputed disability receive targeted support from Leaders, specialist Diversity Teams, teachers and CSPD Support Teams through a personalised planning process. This entails gathering information, ongoing monitoring and periodic reviews conducted in consultation and collaboration with parents/carers, students and other key stakeholders, to identify the functional impact of the student's disability and determine the adjustments they require at school.

Across CSPD schools, the 2026 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) reports 240 students in Secondary schools and 194 students in Primary schools with physical, cognitive, social/emotional or sensory (hearing or vision impairment) disability. By providing all students, including those who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people,

with the support they need to thrive with dignity, CSPD ensures they learn in culturally safe, inclusive and supportive environments.

Cultural Pathways and Identity-Driven Learning Engagement

Jarara strengthens learning engagement through PCPs. Evidence from St Matthew's Primary Windsor, for instance, indicates that these plans help students identify goals that support learning and wellbeing, while student-led cultural practices build confidence and reinforce the link between cultural identity and academic success.

The PCPs, currently implemented across 78 CSPD schools, begin with group yarns where students share their stories, cultural connections and aspirations. These insights inform tailored support that keeps cultural identity central to students' educational experiences.

Trauma-Informed and Culturally Safe Wellbeing Practice

Marian Catholic College Kenthurst and the Mission team highlight the importance of trauma-informed practice in supporting learning. Trauma-informed training for educators strengthens their capacity and skills to support students affected by intergenerational trauma or complex circumstances, helping create safe, supportive learning environments.

The Mission team's partnership with Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation supports teachers in delivering Religious Education through an Aboriginal lens. Baabayn is a community-led space created by respected Aboriginal Elders in Western Sydney to provide cultural safety, healing and strong connections for individuals and families. It offers a welcoming environment where people are heard, supported and encouraged to build confidence, pride and belonging.

Resources such as the *Fences and Walls* workbook, produced with Baabayn, deepen understanding of Aboriginal trauma and healing, contributing to culturally responsive pedagogy and more inclusive learning environments.

Academic Progress Across the Early and Middle Years

System-wide monitoring of NAPLAN outcomes

provides insight into learning progress for First Nations students. Year 3 results in 2025 showed strong gains across all domains, rising 8 to 16 percentage points above the State Mean. Year 5 results showed improvement only in Writing, while Year 7 outcomes declined across all domains. Year 9 results showed selective improvement in Reading and Spelling. These patterns highlight strong early foundations but reinforce the need for sustained academic support through upper Primary and early Secondary years. Here, our teams have ample opportunity to make a greater impact.

Senior Years Participation, Achievement and High Expectations

Participation in the HSC has continued to rise, with Indigenous student numbers increasing from 41 in 2020 to 82 in 2025. However, performance trends show a decline in the proportion of HSC marks at or above the State Mean. As non-Indigenous students experienced a similar decline, this indicates a need for strengthened academic support across the board.

Emmanuel Catholic College Kemps Creek exemplifies what is possible, with 91% of First Nations students achieving in the top two literacy bands due to high expectations, rigorous learning and differentiated opportunities. St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, Marian Catholic College Kenthurst and St Columba's Catholic College Springwood also demonstrate high expectations through a range of leadership opportunities, culturally responsive teaching and targeted academic support.

Mentoring, Leadership and Cultural Identity as Drivers of Learning

Mentoring and leadership opportunities across schools and teams significantly strengthen learning engagement and academic success. The Birraygal Pillars of Culture Boys Program, delivered across several schools, provides mentoring that builds confidence, identity and resilience. The program was developed and is taught and assessed by the Jarara Cultural Officer and the Youth Mentor to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students connect with their culture and identity.

St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill offers leadership opportunities through its Junior Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

(JAECEG), Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and cultural forums, while St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park provides senior Indigenous leadership roles and student-led cultural education initiatives. Developed, led and implemented by Jarara, with Student Support teams assisting with supervision, Murama and the Rangers Program provide cultural engagement opportunities that strengthen identity, resilience and school connection.

Targeted Academic Support and Culturally Informed Pathways

Our schools, such as St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill and St Columba's Catholic College Springwood, with assistance from the Post School Options team, offer targeted support that strengthens academic engagement and transitions into further education. The Post School Options team provides pathway planning for Years 9 to 12, including workplace learning, skills development and connections to employment services. PCPs also ensure learning needs are understood and addressed through collaboration between teachers, families and specialists.

Partnerships with universities and Indigenous Education Units are strengthening aspiration, mentoring and post-school readiness for First Nations students. The Western Sydney University Pathways to Dreaming partnerships at St Columba's and St Agnes build confidence, academic readiness and university exposure for students in Years 7 to 12.

St Columba's Pathways to Possibility event further connects students with tertiary institutions, while the Post School Options Future Ready program provides culturally grounded transition planning that supports informed post-school decision-making.

Growing Enrolments, Fee-Free Access and Cultural Visibility

From 1 January 2026, as a commitment through CSPD's Innovate RAP, a fee-free education offering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families has strengthened access, inclusion and choice, deepening trust with families. This initiative supports CSPD's aspiration to become the educational system of choice for First Nations communities. It also accords with CSPD's strategy, which seeks to ensure that CSPD attracts a student base broadly

representative of the communities we serve, increasing diversity where we can, including First Nations students. This new offering will prove a key pillar in our financial support system for students.

Enrolments of First Nations students have increased from 863 in 2021 to 1,382 in 2026, reflecting targeted outreach, improved transitions and strengthened cultural inclusion. The Growing Enrolments Committee has supported this growth through strategic planning and community engagement. In particular, in 2026, the fee-free offering has seen a 14% increase in First Nations enrolments. This builds on a 7% increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in 2025.

Cultural initiatives such as dance programs, PCPs and truth-telling opportunities have strengthened cultural safety and visibility, while participation in community events such as the Baabyan NAIDOC Event, Mount Druitt Reconciliation Walk and Indigenous Veterans' Service has further built connection, trust and confidence in our school system. The First Nations Fee Free Offering was launched with a community celebration at the Jarara Cultural Centre in Mount Druitt, with attendees including local Elders, families, students and CSPD staff.

Retention, HSC Participation and Re-Engagement Strategies

Closing the Gap Target 5 is to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20–24) attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent by 2031. CSPD retention data from 2020 to 2025 shows stabilisation and improvement, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Year 10–12 retention rose from 44.4% to 64.5%, while Year 11–12 retention reached 108.1%, reflecting successful re-engagement strategies, dedicated support and flexible pathways. Ongoing focus on continuous improvement, cultural inclusion and student support will be essential to sustaining these gains through the senior years.

Indigenous HSC participation also continues to increase, rising from 10 students (0.35% of total HSC participation) in 2016 to 52 (1.85%) in 2019, 62 (2.18%) in 2023 and 82 (2.67%) in 2025. Building on the improvements seen in senior-years retention, these steady gains highlight the commitment of our First Nations students and staff, and continued focus on strengthening senior pathways and supportive, culturally responsive learning environments will



help maintain this positive trajectory in the years ahead.

VET Pathways and School-Based Traineeships

The VET team supports First Nations students through Preliminary HSC and HSC VET enrolments, with 46 students participating in 2026. St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill's partnership with Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) provides School Based Traineeships in Allied Health, giving students early, practical experience in culturally informed health career pathways. Students aspire to careers in nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. These pathways strengthen long-term engagement by connecting schooling with tangible future opportunities.

Partnerships for Learning Material Support

The Procurement team has collaborated with suppliers to provide uniform vouchers and stationery packs for students experiencing financial hardship, reducing financial barriers and ensuring First Nations students have essential learning materials when needed. Suppliers have contributed 100 stationery packs, uniform vouchers and additional support across schools, helping students engage fully in learning and feel confident in their school environment, particularly during key transition points or periods of financial pressure.

Impact and Outcomes

Improved Learning Engagement and Academic Achievement

Schools are seeing measurable gains in learning engagement and academic performance. At Emmaus Catholic College Kemps Creek, for example, 91% of First Nations students achieved in the top two literacy bands, demonstrating the impact of high expectations and culturally informed teaching on sustained academic success. Across St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, Marian Catholic College Kenthurst and St Columba's Catholic College Springwood, students show increased confidence, stronger

participation and improved academic readiness, reflecting the positive influence of cultural identity, leadership opportunities and personalised support.

Stronger Early Years Engagement and Readiness for Learning

Early years outcomes show stronger cultural connection and improved readiness for learning. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at St Joseph's Primary Kingswood and other schools demonstrate greater engagement through early cultural identity development, while consistent participation in activities has contributed to more stable early learning patterns.

Increased Attendance, Stability and Wellbeing

The attendance rate for Indigenous students has remained relatively stable with a slight improvement on 2022 levels (85.1%); however, it is still below that of non-Indigenous students. The Up and Go Bus Service has reduced attendance barriers, resulting in more children arriving ready to learn and experiencing positive early learning environments. Therapeutic case management and culturally responsive planning have contributed to improved attendance patterns, particularly for students facing complex challenges. These improvements ensure students remain connected to schooling and are better positioned to progress into future pathways.

Strengthened Cultural Identity and Learning Confidence

Students participating in cultural programs and PCPs demonstrate stronger cultural identity, increased confidence and greater persistence in learning. These outcomes show that when cultural identity is recognised and valued, students engage more deeply and sustain their learning over time.

Learning Progress Through NAPLAN and HSC Trends

Indigenous NAPLAN results indicate strong early-years progress, with Year 3 outcomes significantly above the State Mean and Year 5 Writing showing continued improvement. While Year 7 and Year 9 results highlight areas requiring sustained support, the early-years gains demonstrate the effectiveness of culturally



grounded foundations. Indigenous HSC (Year 12) participation has nearly doubled since 2020, reflecting improved retention and stronger engagement in senior Secondary pathways.

Building on these participation trends, retention outcomes also show clear improvement, particularly in the senior years. Increased Year 11–12 retention and successful re-engagement of students demonstrate the effectiveness of flexible pathways and sustained support. Although achievement patterns vary, increased participation shows that more students are remaining engaged through to Year 12. These gains reflect stronger cultural inclusion and a greater sense of safety for families and students alike.

Clearer Pathways into Further Education, Training and Employment

Students now have clearer, more culturally informed pathways into further education and employment. University exposure, mentoring and vocational learning have increased aspiration and readiness, with students demonstrating greater awareness of post-school opportunities. Leadership development and pathway planning have contributed to stronger long-term engagement.

Increased Access, Inclusion and Enrolment Growth

The fee-free offering, combined with enrolment support from Jarara, has significantly strengthened access and inclusion. Enrolments have grown from 863 First Nations students in 2021 to 1,382 in 2026, reflecting increased trust, cultural safety and confidence in the system. Increased cultural visibility through various initiatives and activities has deepened relationships with families, strengthening long-term engagement and learning continuity.

Stronger Community Connection and Visibility of Cultural Inclusion

Schools also reported stronger community relationships and increased visibility of cultural inclusion. Participation in key community events has deepened trust and strengthened partnerships, while cultural inclusion initiatives have helped students feel seen, valued and supported. These outcomes contribute to improved engagement, retention and a stronger sense of belonging across the system.

Strengthened Family Engagement and Home–School Relationships

Families are demonstrating stronger engagement and confidence in navigating schooling. Personalised enrolment support, transition assistance and targeted communication have resulted in smoother transitions and more positive school/family partnerships. These partnerships have encouraged families to participate more fully in school life, supporting long-term engagement and improved learning continuity for students.

Enhanced Capability Through Trauma-Informed and Culturally Grounded Practice

Staff capability has strengthened through trauma-informed training and culturally grounded professional learning. Teachers report increased confidence in supporting students affected by intergenerational trauma, contributing to safer and more supportive learning environments. Culturally informed Religious Education resources have broadened understanding of Aboriginal histories and perspectives across the system.

Chapter 3

Employment and Economic Development

Socio-economic Outcomes 7 and 8

Across our schools, teams and corporate functions, there is a strong commitment to improving employment and economic development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes direct work with students and organisational practices that strengthen broader economic participation. The initiatives in this chapter highlight purposeful partnerships, culturally grounded pathways, targeted transition support and procurement practices that expand opportunities for First Nations young people and communities.

These actions directly support Outcomes 7 and 8 of the National Agreement, which focus on youth engagement in education and employment and strengthened economic participation. Through traineeships, workplace learning, skills development, cultural and careers forums and inclusive procurement, CSPD is helping ensure First Nations students and communities have access to opportunities that build long-term employment prospects and economic advancement.

Initiatives and Actions

School-Based Traineeships and Industry Partnerships

With support from the VET team, St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill has partnered with Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) to deliver a School-Based Traineeship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The program provides culturally responsive pathways through real-world learning, mentoring and industry exposure, with students completing a Certificate III in Allied Health and gaining experience with IAHA.

The traineeship now drives stronger engagement, attendance and academic progress, embedding culturally safe practice and clear post-school pathways. Four students are on track to graduate in 2026, aspiring to careers in nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and midwifery. One of the alumni who has transitioned from the program into further study and career development exemplifies the program's impact and continues to inspire current students.

Transition and Employment Supports

Student Support provides transition and employment supports, including supported workplace learning, skills development training, School Leaver Employment Supports and Disability Employment Services. Together, these initiatives create structured pathways that build confidence, strengthen employability skills and support young people to engage with education and employment opportunities.

These supports are relational and responsive, ensuring students receive guidance that reflects their strengths, needs and aspirations. By coordinating services and maintaining culturally grounded engagement in collaboration with the Jarara team, our Post School Options team helps students navigate transitions with clarity and support.

Post-School Options (PSO) and Future Ready

The PSO team has expanded access to coordinated transition support across our schools. They are committed to ensuring every

First Nations student has the opportunity to engage in pathway planning with a PSO Leading Teacher, where appropriate. This student-centred approach prioritises student voice and involves families, school staff and key stakeholders in co-designing pathways.

Interventions may include supported workplace learning, skills development training and connections to Disability Employment Services and School Leaver Employment Programs. Where possible, students are also linked with First Nations-focused services that align with their goals and preferences, as well as broader community support systems.

PSO is piloting the Future Ready program with Marist Learning Zone (MLZ), where around 60 percent of students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals. Delivered in partnership with Marist Schools Australia, MLZ supports vulnerable and disengaged CSPD students in an environment that prioritises wellbeing, re-engagement and transition to future pathways. Building on this foundation, the Future Ready pilot strengthens access to tailored transition planning and, if successful, will provide a model that can be scaled across other schools with large numbers of First Nations students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senior Students Forum

Jarara's work in 2025 included hosting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senior Students Forum at St Columba's Catholic College Springwood. The forum brought together students in Years 10 to 12 from 13 Secondary schools, creating a significant opportunity for connection, reflection and future planning. Students engaged with universities, training organisations and employers offering pathways for First Nations young people.

The keynote address by Thomas Mayo, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leader and Assistant National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, provided insights into advocacy, justice and the ongoing journey toward recognition for First Nations peoples. Drawing on his personal work, including *The Voice to Parliament Handbook*, he offered powerful context for understanding leadership and community responsibility.

Cultural activities such as dance, weaving, art, storytelling and yarning with Elders

strengthened cultural connection and grounded students in identity as they explored future opportunities. A student panel chaired by Thomas brought together current students and alumni to share their journeys, challenges and aspirations, creating a strong platform for student voice and peer learning.

Organisational Procurement and Economic Participation

As part of our Innovate RAP, CSPD is committed to increasing procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses. By embedding supplier diversity into our procurement practices, we support the growth of the First Nations economy, create sustainable economic opportunities and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Reinforcing this commitment, our procurement policies and procedures promote Indigenous procurement participation and ensure that procurement systems are inclusive and accountable. Over the past year to April 2026, Kallico Catering has been contracted to provide services at six events, including In Dialogue sessions, Commissioning Ceremonies for New System Leaders and Early Career Teachers, and the Memorial Mass for our former Executive Director Greg Whitby.

The Procurement team recently conducted a cleaning services tender in which three First Nations suppliers were invited to participate through the standard procurement approach. One Indigenous supplier, VDG Indigenous Services, was successful through the evaluation process and has since been engaged to provide services to several schools under a contract currently valued at approximately \$1.5 million per annum.

CSPD's preferred stationery suppliers also provide First Nations products to schools, with Winc supplying the Mandura brand and Complete Office Supplies offering Muru Office Supplies. Additionally, our organisation supports bodies such as Supply Nation and the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, which promote accredited Indigenous supplier engagement. This arrangement ensures that our First Nations suppliers are all certified. Together, these efforts contribute to broader economic participation and generate flow-on benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Impact and Outcomes

Strengthened Engagement in Education and Employment Pathways

Students are increasingly engaged in structured pathways that link learning to employment. The Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) traineeship strengthens motivation, attendance and academic progress, with students preparing for careers in high-demand health fields. Transition support reinforces this engagement by providing workplace learning, skills development and employment services that build capability and readiness for employment.

Culturally Grounded Pathways Build Identity and Confidence

Culturally grounded approaches strengthen identity and cultural pride while supporting employment pathways. The IAHA traineeship builds vocational skills and cultural belonging through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors and role models, helping students develop greater confidence in their future pathways. The Senior Students Forum similarly grounded future planning in culture, enabling

students to explore options with a strong sense of identity and increased self-assurance.

Greater Access to Workplace Learning and Economic Participation

Our work has broadened access to employment supports through workplace learning, skills training and employment services that provide coordinated, culturally safe guidance for students moving into work or further study. Programs such as Future Ready and School Leaver Employment Supports deepen industry engagement. Inclusive procurement practices also increase opportunities for First Nations businesses, contributing to broader economic participation.

Clearer Post-School Pathways and Strengthened Aspirations

Efforts across schools and teams have created clearer and more achievable post-school pathways for Indigenous students. The IAHA traineeship offers a tangible route into health careers, while transition support helps students identify and pursue pathways according to their strengths. The Senior Students Forum further strengthened aspirations by exposing students to opportunities and role models, leaving them more confident and ready to pursue their goals.





Chapter 4

Housing and Infrastructure

Socio-economic Outcomes 9 and 17

Our organisation's mission as an education provider means we are not responsible for delivering housing, infrastructure or the broader facilities associated with Outcomes 9 and 17 of the National Agreement. Nevertheless, we recognise that these socio-economic conditions shape the learning environments and life opportunities of the students and families we serve. We therefore remain committed to contributing meaningfully to the achievement of these targets where they intersect with our educational mandate.

In a digital-driven world, access to devices, connectivity and digital literacy is essential for full participation in education and society. Our digital inclusion work for First Nations students and families aligns with Outcome 17 by supporting access to information and services for informed decision-making. It reflects our understanding that many families face unequal access to digital resources and the skills to use them confidently.

Initiatives and Actions

Strengthening Organisational Understanding of Digital Inclusion

The need for greater attention to digital inclusion was highlighted in our Closing the Gap Report 2025 and reinforced by the First Nations Digital Inclusion in Western Sydney report published by Western Sydney University's Centre for Western Sydney and the Whitlam Institute. In November 2025, our Policy and Advocacy Officer prepared a briefing for the Executive Leadership Team summarising key findings and outlining strategic recommendations. This work is shaping a clearer organisational understanding of the digital challenges facing First Nations students and families. Centre for Western Sydney Director Professor Azadeh Dastyari was also invited to address System Leaders on her research to ensure that Principals were informed about these important insights.

Early analysis confirmed that digital inclusion is uneven across our communities, with many First Nations families experiencing barriers similar to those faced by low-income households

more broadly. These insights have guided subsequent actions and reinforced the urgency of addressing digital access, affordability and digital literacy as core components of equitable education.

Establishing the First Nations Digital Inclusion Working Group

In response to the identified need, we established a First Nations Digital Inclusion Working Group with representation from the Jarara Cultural Centre and Student Support, IT, Finance & Infrastructure, and Growth, Communications & Engagement Directorates, alongside a parent representative. The group is focused on developing a deeper understanding of digital inclusion across our schools and communities and identifying practical ways to strengthen access and digital capability.

The group is reviewing current arrangements for device access and connectivity at school and at home, including how to ensure that every student who requires a device has access to an appropriate one. It is also exploring options to support families with home connectivity

and provide basic technology assistance for those who need help supporting their children's learning.

Reviewing Digital Equity Among First Nations Students and Families

Working closely with Jarara, we are developing a clearer picture of digital equity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. This includes identifying gaps in access, affordability and digital literacy that may be limiting participation in learning.

We are also examining the experiences of schools that already provide digital devices, particularly laptops, to understand what is working well and identify models that may be scalable or adaptable for broader implementation across our school communities.

Exploring Partnership Opportunities

Recognising that digital inclusion requires coordinated effort, we are exploring partnership opportunities to support improved access to devices, connectivity and digital literacy. This includes identifying organisations interested in collaborating to strengthen digital inclusion outcomes for the families and communities we serve.

These partnerships are being considered alongside internal efforts to encourage a more consistent approach to technology provisioning across our schools, including reflection on the equity implications of existing Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) programs. Any partnerships will complement current efforts to meet students' digital needs, including direct assistance provided to families by the Jarara Cultural Centre.

Anticipated Impact and Outcomes

Improved Access to Devices and Connectivity

Through the work of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Working Group and ongoing review with Jarara, we anticipate a clearer and more consistent approach to ensuring that students have access to appropriate learning devices at school and at home. Strengthened

understanding of current arrangements will support more equitable distribution of resources and identify where additional support is required.

As options for supporting home connectivity are developed, families currently facing barriers to internet access will be better positioned to engage with learning outside school hours. This will contribute to more consistent participation in digital learning environments and reduce disparities in access.

Enhanced Digital Literacy for Students and Families

By identifying opportunities to strengthen digital literacy, we expect increased confidence among students and families in navigating digital platforms and tools. This will support more effective engagement with school-based learning, strengthen families' ability to participate in informed decision-making, and enable access to essential services that are increasingly digitalised.

Improved digital literacy will also reduce the burden on schools where families currently require additional support to manage technology-related aspects of their children's education. Over time, this will contribute to a more seamless, inclusive and consistent digital learning environment across our schools.

Stronger Organisational Alignment with Closing the Gap Priorities

The ongoing efforts position our organisation to respond more decisively to the digital inclusion challenges facing First Nations students and families. By embedding digital inclusion considerations into organisational planning and practice, we reinforce our commitment to equitable access and support broader socio-economic targets associated with Outcome 17 of the National Agreement.

As partnership opportunities develop and best-practice models are identified, we expect more consistent and sustainable approaches to digital inclusion across our schools. This will strengthen our capacity to advocate for the needs of children, young people and families in Western Sydney and contribute to long-term improvements in broader socio-economic outcomes.

Chapter 5

Access to Justice

Socio-economic Outcomes 10 and 11

Access to justice is essential to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, which is why Outcomes 10 and 11 of the National Agreement focus on reducing First Nations overrepresentation. This commitment is reflected in our support for the Raise the Age campaign, and in practice across our schools and Support Teams through early intervention, culturally grounded advocacy and coordinated responses to the factors that place students at risk of adverse childhood experiences and contact with the justice system.

Student Support teams work with students experiencing complex personal and socio-economic challenges which may lead to educational disengagement and the possibility of justice system contact. Our approach centres on culturally safe engagement, restorative practices and strong advocacy to ensure First Nations students are supported in ways that uphold dignity, responsibility and connection to family and community.

Initiatives and Actions

Early Intervention for Students Experiencing Complex Challenges

Student Support teams play a significant role in supporting students who face heightened vulnerability. The Post School Options (PSO), Attendance and Behaviour teams work with young people experiencing homelessness, justice involvement or risk of disengagement, recognising that these factors can potentially escalate into justice system contact if not addressed early. Their work focuses on stabilising circumstances where possible, strengthening relationships and ensuring that young people remain connected to education and community.

The teams provide targeted assistance for students at risk of disengagement. This includes coordinated case management, collaboration with families and schools, and the identification of supports that address both immediate needs and longer-term wellbeing. These interventions reduce the likelihood of behaviours that may lead to disciplinary action or justice involvement.

Culturally Grounded Advocacy and Restorative Approaches

The Jarara team contributes significantly to

supporting access to justice through culturally informed advocacy. The Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO) works closely with schools and families to ensure that responses to behavioural or wellbeing concerns are culturally safe and appropriate. This often involves advocating for restorative justice strategies that encourage students to take responsibility for their actions while avoiding punitive measures that may compound existing challenges.

Restorative approaches prioritise dialogue, accountability and healing. They help students understand the impact of their behaviour while maintaining their connection to school, family and community. In this way, they support the broader aim of reducing First Nations overrepresentation in the justice system by addressing issues early in culturally appropriate ways and preventing escalation.

At the same time, schools are supported by Student Support teams to ensure that all discipline responses are fair, proportionate and consistent, reducing the incidence of perceived and actual racism. This commitment to consistent, ethical behaviour management that actively addresses and reduces racism supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing.

Advocacy for Justice and the Rights of Children and Young People

As a leading organisation committed to the wellbeing, dignity and future of children and young people, CSPD has signed up to the Raise the Age campaign in NSW. This reflects our mission to uphold the inherent value of every child and our commitment to education, care, pastoral support and social justice.

By calling for a justice system that nurtures rather than harms, we advocate strongly for vulnerable children and young people, including those from First Nations communities who are disproportionately affected by current laws. They deserve culturally informed, community-led support rather than criminalisation.

Impact and Outcomes

Reduced Risk Factors and Strengthened Engagement

The work of Jarara, together with Student Support teams, has contributed to reducing the risk factors associated with justice system involvement. By addressing homelessness, disengagement and instability early, these teams help students remain connected to school and community. This connection is a protective

factor that reduces the likelihood of contact with the juvenile justice system.

Students who receive coordinated support generally demonstrate improved attendance, greater engagement and stronger relationships with trusted adults. These outcomes reflect the effectiveness of early intervention and the importance of culturally grounded support in preventing escalation.

Increased Use of Restorative and Culturally Safe Responses

The advocacy of the Jarara team, alongside the FLO, has strengthened the use of restorative justice approaches. By encouraging responses that focus on accountability, learning and repair rather than punishment, schools are better able to support First Nations students in ways that uphold dignity, build responsibility and deepen understanding of accountability. This shift reduces the likelihood of practices that can contribute to justice system involvement.

Students who participate in restorative processes often report feeling heard and respected, and families express greater confidence in the fairness and cultural safety of school responses. These outcomes advance the goals of reducing overrepresentation and ensuring that First Nations young people experience justice systems that are responsive, respectful and oriented toward prevention rather than punishment.



Chapter 6

Families and Kin

Socio-economic Outcomes 12 and 13

Strong family and kin relationships are central to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Outcomes 12 and 13 of the National Agreement focus on reducing First Nations overrepresentation in the child protection system and ensuring safe families and households. Strong culturally responsive home–school connections are recognised as a foundation for good school engagement.

Our school leaders and teachers work closely with families, the Jarara team, the Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and Student Support to identify personal and socio-economic concerns early. Through proactive engagement and culturally grounded relationships, schools aim to promote safety, stability and continuity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

Initiatives and Actions

Strengthening Home–School Connections and Culturally Grounded Partnerships

Schools prioritise strong home–school relationships as a key protective factor for First Nations children. Staff work with families to build trust and understanding, supported by the Jarara team and the FLO, who ensure that cultural perspectives guide communication and decision making. These partnerships help families feel respected and supported, which encourages early disclosure of concerns.

This approach is particularly important when families face challenges such as housing instability, financial stress or domestic and family violence. By maintaining open communication and culturally safe engagement, schools can respond early and collaboratively, reducing the likelihood of issues escalating to statutory child protection involvement.

Early Identification and Coordinated Support for Vulnerable Students

The work of Student Support, together with the Jarara team, also helps identify early signs of risk, providing timely assistance. Teachers are attentive to indicators of serious family issues that may place children at risk of harm. When concerns arise, responses are guided by cultural

awareness and a commitment to supporting families rather than stigmatising them, while maintaining CSPD’s legal obligations and duty of care.

Proactive engagement with students who have or are going through diverse childhood experiences includes individualised wellbeing support, safety planning and referrals to external services, where appropriate. Schools also endeavour to provide culturally safe and supportive environments where students feel safe to seek help. These coordinated efforts attempt to promote and normalise an ethos of help-seeking, leading to improved safety in the short term and throughout the lifespan.

Impact and Outcomes

Reduced Risk of Child Protection Involvement Through Early Intervention

The emphasis on strong home–school relationships and early identification of concerns may mitigate risk factors associated with statutory child protection involvement. Families

that feel connected to the school and supported by culturally informed staff are more likely to seek help before issues escalate. This early engagement allows schools to intervene in ways that stabilise children's circumstances and improve family safety.

The efforts of Student Support and the broader school communities to maintain or improve school engagement with students experiencing adverse childhood experiences represent a strengthened protective factor in those children's lives. Students who receive timely support are more likely to remain engaged in school and experience a sense of safety and continuity. These outcomes may help prevent entry into the statutory Out Of Home Care system.

Safer Families and Stronger Cultural and Community Connections

Collaboration between schools, the Jarara team, the Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and Support Teams contributes to safer and more supported families. Culturally grounded advocacy ensures that families' strengths are recognised and that responses to concerns are respectful and appropriate. This builds trust and promotes safety within households.

Individualised support and referrals help families address challenges such as domestic violence, mental health concerns and instability. By connecting families with the right support services at the right time, schools contribute to safer, more stable and culturally connected environments. These efforts contribute to Outcome 13 by strengthening family wellbeing and reinforcing the importance of kinship, belonging and cultural identity.



Chapter 7

Connection to Country, Culture and Languages

Socio-economic Outcomes 15 and 16

Connection to Country, culture and languages is central to the identity, wellbeing and educational experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Outcomes 15 and 16 of the National Agreement focus on maintaining strong relationships with land and waters and ensuring that First Nations cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing. Across our schools and teams, these commitments are reflected in cultural learning, partnerships with Elders and community, and the creation of spaces and experiences that honour Country and cultural authority.

The initiatives described in this chapter demonstrate how schools and teams work with the Jarara Cultural Centre, Aboriginal Elders, cultural educators and families to embed cultural knowledge, strengthen identity and promote continuity of cultural practice. These actions support students to deepen their understanding of Country, engage with cultural traditions and participate in learning environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are visible, respected and celebrated, while also strengthening cultural capability across the wider school community.

Initiatives and Actions

Country-Based Learning and Cultural Storytelling

At St Joseph's Primary Kingswood, students learn about Country through weekly engagement with the Aboriginal Family Liaison Officer (FLO), who shares stories, cultural teachings and experiences that help students explore their relationship with land and community. These sessions include storytelling, discussions and Indigenous artwork, enabling students to reflect on their own experiences and deepen their understanding of Country in a supportive and culturally grounded environment.

The collaboration between the FLO and the Jarara team supports cultural experiences across the school year, including NAIDOC Week and Harmony Day. The teams also assist teachers in planning and programming to ensure First Nations perspectives are embedded in classroom learning, helping both Indigenous students and the whole school community

develop a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and ways of understanding.

Environmental Stewardship and Cultural Camps

First Nations students across our schools, including St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, strengthen connection to Country and culture through the Junior Rangers Program and Murama Cultural Camps. These initiatives emphasise environmental stewardship, cultural responsibility and the spiritual relationship between people and land, giving students opportunities to learn directly from cultural educators and community members. Supported by a federal government grant, the Jarara team delivers the Program in partnership with Indigenise.

Students participated in activities including the Barduu Ngaadjung First Nations Water Forum, Healing Ngurra, a cultural burn at Yiraaldiya National Park and an extended On-Country

experience to Bourke and Brewarrina. These experiences strengthened cultural connection and environmental understanding while building relationships across schools and communities. Ongoing cultural lessons led by Dr John Hunter reinforce these teachings by connecting cultural knowledge with environmental awareness.

Cultural Protocols, Ceremonies and Community Authority

Schools such as St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Matthew's Primary Windsor, St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park and Marian Catholic College Kenthurst maintain cultural protocols through Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country, smoking ceremonies and water blessings. These practices are conducted with guidance from Elders and cultural educators, ensuring authenticity and respect for local cultural authority while modelling appropriate cultural practice for students and staff.

Smoking ceremonies at Marian Catholic College, led by a local Indigenous man, Uncle David Marne, provide students with a deeper understanding of cleansing practices and spiritual relationships with land. At St Agnes, all engagements follow Dharug protocols, reinforcing cultural authority and demonstrating the importance of respectful consultation with community and cultural leaders.

Cultural Spaces, Murals and School Environments

St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, St Matthew's Primary Windsor, St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park, St Columba's Catholic College Springwood and CathWest Innovation College have all created cultural spaces that strengthen cultural identity and connection to Country. Yarning Circles at St Agnes, St Luke's and St Columba's provide culturally grounded spaces for listening, learning and reflection, developed with Elders and cultural educators to ensure cultural authority and authenticity.

Murals and artwork at St Matthew's, St Luke's and CathWest honour totems, natural elements and cultural narratives. St Columba's naming of the building Ngurra, meaning home or place, symbolises belonging and connection to Country, reinforcing cultural visibility and creating a culturally meaningful environment for students and families.

Language and Cultural Expression

St Matthew's Primary Windsor is among the schools leading significant efforts to embed Aboriginal language across many aspects of school life. These include student-led Acknowledgements of Country in Darug language, the National Anthem sung in both English and Darug, and the incorporation of Darug words into school infrastructure. These practices promote respect for local language and strengthen cultural continuity and appreciation of First Nations peoples' languages across the school community.

Jarara's Cultural Plans at the school also support students in strengthening identity and cultural knowledge. Whole-school learning about Torres Strait Islander culture broadens cultural understanding and ensures engagement with diverse First Nations perspectives, helping students appreciate the richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Cultural Leadership, Student Voice and Community Partnerships

St Agnes Catholic High School Rooty Hill, Emmaus Catholic College Kemps Creek and CathWest Innovation College provide leadership opportunities that centre on culture and identity. Student leadership through the Junior Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (JAECEG), Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and cultural forums at St Agnes promotes continuity and empowers students to take active roles in cultural learning and representation.

At Emmaus Catholic College, the Leader of Culture portfolio provides a formal leadership pathway for students to promote cultural knowledge and pride. CathWest also demonstrates strong cultural leadership through student-led art projects and the creation of message sticks and boomerangs, reflecting sustained engagement and responsibility in cultural practice and strengthening cultural visibility.

Cultural Support and Culturally Responsive Case Management

Jarara's leadership, together with the assistance provided to the team by Student Support, contributes to the appreciation and deepening of Aboriginal culture through Murama, cultural events, immersion opportunities and culturally

responsive case management. Murama provides culturally grounded leadership and healing experiences that reinforce cultural identity, visibility and continuity for young people.

Similarly, the Rangers Program strengthens young people's appreciation of and connection to Country, land and waters. Collaboration with the Jarara team ensures cultural knowledge remains central to student support, helping students develop confidence and cultural pride while maintaining strong cultural connections.

Professional Learning Through Crossing Cultures: Hidden Histories

Throughout 2025, the Jarara team delivered professional learning using the "Crossing Cultures: Hidden Histories" program. This series of poster artworks, facilitated by trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, provided culturally safe insights into First Nations histories, experiences and perspectives.

The program deepened staff understanding of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and past government policies, while highlighting the resilience, cultural strength and ongoing endurance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This learning strengthened the cultural capability of participants and enhanced culturally informed practice in schools.

Strong Sistas Cultural Leadership Program

The Strong Sistas program, delivered across three all-girls high schools, supported 68 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to strengthen cultural pride, identity, connection and leadership. The program created a culturally safe space for students to learn, share and grow together through creative and reflective activities.

Students explored the 2025 NAIDOC theme "Strength, Vision and Legacy – The Next Generation" through collaborative artwork, weaving and cultural reflection. These activities helped students connect their personal journeys to cultural strength, kinship and the legacy of their Elders, reinforcing their role as future cultural leaders and knowledge holders.

Birraygal Pillars of Culture Boys Mentoring Program

Research and literature highlight the lack of

Aboriginal perspectives within the education system and the success achieved through Aboriginal-led cultural programs. The Jarara Cultural Centre has therefore developed the Birraygal Pillars of Culture Boys Program to address the fundamental need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be connected with their culture and identity. Facilitated by Jarara Cultural Officers, the program provides authentic cultural mentorship for First Nations boys.

The program is designed to represent the distinct and intrinsic foundations of ancient and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait



Islander cultures, inserting each Pillar into an interconnected and holistic perspective of Indigenous culture and identity. Through this structure, participants are drawn into a deep and comprehensive understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

Beginning as a pilot in 2024, it expanded in 2025 to six Primary schools, including Holy Family Emerton, Holy Family Luddenham, St Joseph's Kingswood, St Francis of Assisi Glendenning, St Monica's Richmond and Corpus Christi Cranebrook, because of strong engagement and positive outcomes for participating students.

Personalised Cultural Pathways (PCPs) Across Schools

In 2025, Jarara worked with students from Kindergarten to Year 12 across CSPD schools to develop PCPs. These pathways focus on understanding each student's strengths, aspirations, challenges and cultural connections, ensuring support is culturally informed and tailored. The process also helps students better appreciate and learn about their cultures.

The new process, which immerses First Nations students in cultural appreciation and understanding, began with group yarns at each school, allowing students to share their stories and cultural aspirations. Seventy-eight schools completed these initial yarns, providing valuable insight into students' cultural needs and priorities and shaping future cultural initiatives.

Truth-telling and Stolen Generation Engagement

Jarara is committed to Truth-telling as part of Reconciliation. To this end, the team partners with Uncles from Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation. In the past year, the Uncles visited several schools to share their experiences as survivors of the Stolen Generation. Over 1,500 students, 160 staff and 40 community members participated in these sessions. It is important that our students have an opportunity to experience Truth-telling, and for our staff, parents and senior students to have the opportunity to hear these stories.

These engagements provided powerful insights into the impact of past government policies and the importance of cultural connection. They also helped students understand the significance of

Country and cultural identity being denied to the Stolen Generation, deepening empathy and historical awareness across school communities.

Indigenous Veterans Day Memorial Service

Jarara facilitated school participation in the Indigenous Veterans Day Memorial Service, enabling students to learn about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and servicewomen. Sixty students from 12 schools participated in 2025, reflecting strong engagement and interest.

The service provided an important platform for commemoration and cultural learning, deepening students' understanding of history and cultural resilience. It also strengthened awareness of the contributions and challenges faced by First Nations veterans, supporting respectful recognition.

Impact and Outcomes

Deepened Understanding of Country and Cultural Responsibility

Cultural practices such as smoking ceremonies, water blessings, Junior Rangers activities and Murama teachings have strengthened students' understanding of Country. These experiences help students appreciate the cultural, spiritual and environmental significance of land and waters, reinforcing their responsibilities as custodians.

Cultural spaces, including Yarning Circles and buildings such as Ngurra at St Columba's Catholic College Springwood, provide ongoing opportunities for meaningful engagement with cultural teachings. Murals, totems and artwork reinforce cultural symbolism and connection to place, supporting long term cultural learning and continuity.

Strengthened Cultural Identity and Pride

Cultural activities across schools and teams have contributed to increased cultural pride and visibility. Students engage in traditions, cultural storytelling and practices that help them build strong cultural identities and a sense of

belonging within their school communities.

Leadership opportunities through JAECG, AECG, cultural forums and the Leader of Culture portfolio empower students to take active roles in cultural learning. Collaboration with Elders and cultural educators reinforces cultural authority and strengthens cultural confidence across year groups.

Strong Cultural Expression and Knowledge

The integration of Aboriginal language across the St Matthew's Primary Windsor school community, along with similar initiatives in other schools, is helping strengthen cultural continuity and respect for First Nations peoples and their many languages. In particular, the use of Darug language in the Acknowledgement of Country, the National Anthem and school infrastructure promotes cultural visibility and linguistic pride for Indigenous students.

The PCPs further support students in strengthening cultural knowledge and give them confidence to express their identity. Together with various initiatives that embed Aboriginal language and cultural values in school life, this activity helps ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages remain strong, appreciated and flourishing across school communities.

Increased Cultural Visibility and Community Engagement

Cultural spaces, murals, noticeboards and publications showcasing First Nations cultures and heritage across schools have increased cultural visibility and strengthened community engagement. These spaces serve as focal points for cultural learning, storytelling and community gathering, reinforcing cultural presence across school environments.

The high volume of cultural artefacts produced at CathWest Innovation College, in particular, demonstrates sustained engagement with cultural practice. These artefacts support cultural pride, healing and voice, contributing to cultural continuity and strengthening community connection.

Enhanced Cultural Capability For Staff

The "Crossing Cultures: Hidden Histories" program deepened staff understanding of First Nations histories, cultures and experiences.

This professional learning strengthened cultural capability for Diocesan personnel, CSPD Support Team and educators, and enhanced culturally informed practice in and outside classrooms.

Staff gained insight into the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma, as well as the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This contributes to more respectful and culturally aware engagement with students and families across schools.

Strengthened Cultural Leadership Among Girls and Boys

The Strong Sistas program strengthened cultural pride, identity and leadership among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. Students explored cultural themes and created collaborative artworks that reflected their connection to kinship, legacy and cultural strength. Their participation deepened cultural belonging and confidence.

The Birraygal Boys Program provides cultural mentoring and strong male role models, supporting boys to build cultural confidence and connection. It offers a safe environment where culture is embedded through authentic and meaningful activities, and students respond positively to the guidance provided by facilitators, strengthening their cultural identity and sense of belonging. Its expansion reflects the program's positive impact and the value placed on culturally grounded support across participating schools.

Stronger Cultural Pathways and Long-Term Cultural Continuity

The PCPs and the Murama Program have strengthened long-term cultural continuity among First Nations students. They engage in cultural learning that is tailored, meaningful and connected to Country, supporting cultural development beyond the classroom.

Truth-telling engagements and participation in the Indigenous Veterans Day Memorial Service deepen understanding of history and cultural resilience. These experiences contribute to stronger cultural identity and continuity across generations, reinforcing the importance of cultural knowledge and connection.

Final Reflections and Future Outlook

The 2026 Closing the Gap Report highlights the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Within its chapters, culturally grounded practice, respectful partnership and sustained First Nations leadership are shown to be driving meaningful change. While challenges remain - and we are fully committed to addressing them - the impacts of CSPD's work give us confidence that significant progress is possible when schools collaborate purposefully with families, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other partners.

The difference our teams are making in health and wellbeing across our school communities demonstrates the importance of culturally safe environments where students feel supported and connected. Initiatives that strengthen social, emotional and cultural wellbeing continue to be central to educational success and long-term life outcomes. The first chapter reinforces that wellbeing in all its dimensions must remain a core focus of our system-wide approach, particularly because it is a key determinant of educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In education, the need for impactful teaching, early intervention and culturally responsive pedagogy is clear. The achievements of students, supported by educators, families, communities and partner organisations, show that closing the gap is both possible and essential. Continued improvement requires sustained investment, targeted support and strong collaboration with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The resolve and strengths of First Nations students and families assure us of further progress.

Our work in education, employment and economic development, together with efforts to improve digital inclusion, reflects a strong commitment to empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families. Initiatives that build digital capability, strengthen pathways to tertiary study and employment, and expand opportunities for economic participation are fundamental. Digital inclusion remains central because it enables access to learning and employment, shapes academic achievement and career trajectories, and is becoming increasingly critical as artificial intelligence transforms the landscape.

Chapters on access to justice and families and kin highlight broader social determinants that shape life outcomes. Partnerships between schools, Jarara, families and community-controlled organisations can help strengthen safety, stability, advocacy and family ties. Our work supports children and young people to remain with their families and avoid contact with the criminal justice system. These efforts reflect our commitment to supporting the whole child, the whole family and the whole community.

System-wide initiatives are promoting connection to Country, culture and languages, emphasising the central role of cultural identity in shaping belonging, confidence and long-term success for Indigenous students. Cultural knowledge shared by Elders, community leaders and families enriches our schools and strengthens collective understanding. Cultural identity is a vital source of strength for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and must be protected, celebrated and embedded across all aspects of our work.

As we look ahead, CSPD remains committed to closing the gap through continuous reflection, accountability and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, community-controlled organisations and other partners. The achievements in this report form a foundation for the next phase of our journey, working with First Nations communities with respect and shared responsibility to ensure that every Indigenous child can thrive in culturally safe learning environments, succeed and step into a future defined by opportunity and cultural strength.

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