



Improving the Outcomes for Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Students within
Catholic Education Tasmania



Final Report

2022

This Final Report was prepared for the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office by:

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Cover Image

The cover displays the artwork Blooming by Luana Towner, in which the nine Tasmanian Aboriginal nations of long ago are represented as gumnuts. They represent life, standing for the beginning of a journey; of growth. Gumnuts can lie dormant, existing as part of the landscape until they can emerge when conditions are welcoming. Gumnuts grow from the blossoms of eucalypts. Our children bloom in a supportive environment. Water flows in the background representing a journey of learning, the way knowledge flows and accumulates – forever one part of a whole interconnected system.

Each line of water represents the 38 Catholic Schools in lutruwita / Tasmania. The traditional huts in the foreground represent the comfort that comes with security and safety. Three of the huts stand for the Tasmanian Aboriginal families that all Palawa people are descended from. A fourth hut represents the home lutruwita has become for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from elsewhere. The huts are symbolic of the sharing of knowledge and culture that Aboriginal people in lutruwita / Tasmania continue to nurture.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and pay respect to traditional land ownership.

This report has been prepared on the lands of the Mouhennener/muwinina and the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung.

We are committed to enabling all of our students and staff to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, culture and values.

We would also like to acknowledge the commitment of Aboriginal Support Teachers, teachers and school leaders working in Tasmanian Catholic schools¹. Across this project we encountered so many of you focusing on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with passion, good will and a focus on student success.

This research would not have been possible without the support of Rosa Connell, whose dedication has enabled so many dimensions of the research. We would also like to thank Debbie Baird-Bower, who went to a great deal of effort to provide us with the systemic data sets and her valuable insights into the data collection processes.

This project has provided opportunities for the development of a strong working relationship between researchers from Deakin University and the University of Tasmania who care about improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success. We feel that we have also developed good working relationships with the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office staff and are developing relationships between ourselves and the principals and schools.

As the research project has evolved, we have appreciated the increasing engagement of the Catholic school leaders in the project. We are thankful for the opportunity to do this work with school communities and leaders who have high expectations for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

¹*The term schools is used throughout this report to refer to both the schools and colleges within Catholic Education Tasmania.*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	8
Recommendations and Strategies	12
Vignette: Aboriginal Knowledge Sharers and Educators Portal	16
1 Introduction	18
1.1. The Project	
1.2. Contextual Information	19
1.2.1. COVID-19	
1.2.2. Laudato Si': A Call to Care for Country	19
2 The Literature Review	20
3 Findings from the Survey	22
3.1. Categorisation of Activities and Initiatives	22
3.2. Findings from the Written Responses	23
3.2.1. Culture and Identity	23

3.2.2.	Attendance	24
3.2.3.	Leadership, Quality Teaching, and Workforce Development	24
3.2.4.	Partnerships	24
3.2.5.	Literacy and Numeracy	25
3.2.6.	School and Child Readiness	25
3.2.7.	Transition Points and Post-School Options	25
3.2.8.	Additional Themes	25
3.3.	Survey Discussion	25
3.3.1.	Ratings of Perceived Importance	25
3.3.2.	Professional Learning	27
3.3.3.	Engagement: Parents and Community	27

4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Performance 28

4.1.	CET Student Data	28
4.1.1.	Academic Outcomes	30
4.1.2.	Attendance	
4.1.3.	Retention	32
4.2.	Modelling Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students	33
4.2.1.	Method	33
4.2.2.	Data	33
4.2.3.	The Statistical Models	34
4.2.4.	Results	35
4.2.5.	Interpretation	36
4.2.6.	Limitations	36

5 Findings from the Case Studies 38

5.1.	Introduction	38
5.2.	Case Study Methodology	38
5.3.	Findings	40
5.3.1.	Culture and Identity	40
5.3.2.	Partnerships	41
5.3.3.	Attendance	41
5.3.4.	Literacy and Numeracy	42
5.3.5.	Leadership, Quality Teaching,	43

	& Workforce Development	
5.3.6.	Pathways and Transitions	44
5.4.	Benefits of the Student Success Grants	44
5.4.1.	Enhanced Staff Awareness and Understanding	44
5.4.2.	Student Outcomes	45
5.4.3.	Cultural Sensitivity and Community Connections	45
5.5.	Enablers of Success	45
5.6.	Barriers to Success	46
5.7.	Lessons Learnt	46
5.8.	Complexity	46
6	Findings from the Leadership Workshops	47
6.1.	Experience 1: AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4	48
6.2.	Experience 2: Innovative Ways of Connecting to Community	49
6.2.1.	Community Connection by and for the School	49
6.2.2.	Activities by the School and by Community	50
6.2.3.	Two-way, Highly Distributed, and Intergenerational Connections	51
7	Bibliography	52
8	Appendices	53
Appendix A.	Comparative NAPLAN Scale Scores	54
Appendix B.	Overview of EFA and the construction of “Curriculum and Pedagogy” and “Cultural Responsiveness”	57
Appendix C.	Networks of partnerships	58

List of Figures

Figure 1.	The Ten Supports	21
Figure 2.	Perceived Importance of Factors Impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Success	26
Figure 3.	Variance of Perceived Importance of Factors that Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Success in Schools	26
Figure 4.	NAPLAN Scale Score Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by Year Level and Domain (2018 & 2019 Combined)	30
Figure 5.	CET Attendance Levels by Indigenous Status (2019)	31
Figure 6.	Year 10–12 Apparent Retention Rates by Indigenous Status and School Sector (2020)	32
Figure 7.	Hypothesised Model	34
Figure 8.	Standardised Solution for Hypothesised Model	
Figure 9.	Who Schools Connect within the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community	35
Figure 10.	Who Schools Connect within the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community	50
Figure 11.	Connection Activities by Schools and Community	51

List of Tables

Table 1.	Data Collected by Tasmanian Catholic Schools and Colleges	28
Table 2.	Comparative Data Availability	29
Table 3.	Case Study Data	30
Table 4.	Rotated solution for Exploratory Factor Analysis	57

List of Acronyms

- **ACARA** – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
- **AITSL** – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
- **AKT** – Aboriginal Key Teacher
- **ASST** – Aboriginal Student Support Teacher
- **CET** – Catholic Education Tasmania
- **CHAC** – Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation
- **EAL** – English as an Additional Language
- **EFA** – Exploratory Factor Analysis
- **LBOTE** – Language Background other than English
- **NAIDOC** – National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
- **NAPLAN** – National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
- **NATSI Education Strategy** – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy
- **NITA** – National Indigenous Training Academy
- **QVMAG** – Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery
- **PAT** – Progressive Achievement Testing
- **RAP** – Reconciliation Action Plan
- **SEM** – Structural Equation Modelling
- **SETAC** – South East Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation
- **SES** – Socio-economic Status
- **SSG** – Student Success Grant
- **TAC** – Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
- **TMAG** – Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
- **TCEO** – Tasmanian Catholic Education Office
- **WWVP** – Working with Vulnerable People

Executive Summary

The Project

The research was commissioned by the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office (TCEO) and involved a literature review, survey of school/community leaders from 22 schools, analysis of Catholic Education Tasmania (CET) student data; case studies with 10 schools; and collaborative experiences in leadership workshops.

All data collection was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committees of Deakin University and the University of Tasmania.

Findings

Overall, the research found deep commitment of CET staff to supporting the learning and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and evidence of successful work in relation to cultural responsiveness and well-being for students; improved knowledge and awareness for staff; and connection with community organisations.

The research also found significant diversity in views and actions within CET, and uncertainty among staff about what good practice looked like and how to collaborate with community partners.

Ten Supports that Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Success

Analysis of literature identified the following ten supports:

- Working for Community Engagement and Sovereignty
- Pedagogic Practices
- Teacher Agency
- Purposeful Understandings of Literacy
- Purposeful Understandings of Numeracy
- Connectedness
- Cultural Sensitivity and Well-Being

- Leading Whole-School Initiatives
- Curriculum
- Respect for Country, Culture and Languages.

These ten supports are non-hierarchical and work together and provide the necessary pre-conditions to foster student success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In the survey, respondents rated “Respect for Country, Culture and Languages”, “Connectedness” and “Cultural sensitivity and Well-Being” as the most important of these supports.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy Priority Areas

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (NATSI) Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015) has seven priority areas. Findings from the survey, case studies, leadership workshop and analysis of student data relate to five of these priority areas.

Culture and Identity:

- Spaces (such as being on country); cultural sensitivity; and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were emphasised.
- Many current activities designed to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success in schools are connected to culture and identity.
- Schools supported connections with culture and identity by nurturing links between students and the community and, to a lesser extent, through the curriculum.

Partnerships:

- The value of engaging knowledgeable, external organisations, and of genuine (not tokenistic) engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community were emphasised.
- Case study schools are working for community collaboration and partnerships in three ways: removing structural challenges, engaging with multiple perspectives from community, and encouraging community to view the school grounds as a space where they are welcome to practice culture.
- Partnerships are two-way: with people and groups being the ‘recipients’ of connection by the school and/or ‘contributors’ to help create connection with community for the school.
- Schools identified a large number of external organisations they collaborated with to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.
- Connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or organisations to support activities takes time and was challenging in some schools.
- At times building connections with the Aboriginal community was outsourced to external people and organisations who were seen to have the necessary expertise and trust, because school staff felt anxiety about taking this on.

Attendance:

- Strong relationships, a sense of belonging, and cultural sensitivity were emphasised.
- Many current activities designed to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success in schools are connected to attendance, or more broadly to engagement.
- In the survey attendance was cited as challenging, but this was not the case in staff interviews in the case studies.
- Fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (65.7%) than non-Indigenous students (71.5%) in Tasmanian Catholic schools attended more than 90% of school days in 2019.

Literacy and Numeracy:

- Effective use of learning data and the interconnection of learning and well-being were emphasised.
- Literacy and numeracy support and intervention were a common focus in the student success grant applications.
- There is a risk of 'diluted' benefits when initiatives are not targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but to the whole student population.
- On average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Tasmania's Catholic schools and colleges are roughly one NAPLAN1 band behind their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Leadership, Quality Teaching, and Workforce Development:

- The importance of ongoing professional learning and of the Aboriginal Key Teacher (AKT) role was emphasised.
- The distribution of leadership was a key component of schools enacting a whole-school approach to cultivating student success.
- Across all staff input (survey, interviews, workshop) there was a strong desire for more professional learning.
- More knowledge is needed about professional learning and teaching resources that are available for teachers and schools.
- Schools within Catholic Education Tasmania can learn from each other, by sharing knowledge about resources and their own success stories.
- Staff were concerned about their lack of knowledge and about inadvertently making mistakes or causing offence.

Outcomes from the Student Success Grants

Based on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), as the importance placed on cultural responsiveness in schools increases, the educational outcomes (reading, mathematics, and attendance) of Indigenous children increase. Conversely, as the importance placed on Curriculum & Pedagogy increases, the educational outcomes of Indigenous children decline.

Many of the outcomes from the Student Success Grants (SSG), as well as from broader work to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, will take time to emerge. In the shorter term, the research found evidence of four key benefits:

- Enhanced staff awareness and understanding for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Improvements in confidence and self-esteem for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal students.
- A more culturally connected community by providing the necessary support to make respect for Country, culture, and languages more visible in schools.
- Strengthened connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Recommendations and Strategies

Shared Vision

The research found substantial diversity across CET schools in terms of views and actions (as described by participants) to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In part, this reflects the complexity of the task of building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. The diverse responses to complexity are likely to be a positive indicator of schools responding to their local context. Another part, however, seems to stem from more fundamental inconsistencies indicating staff across the state are not 'on the same page'. Some schools also noted contradictory attitudes within their school communities. Such inconsistencies can lead to confusion and reduced or even counter-productive impacts of initiatives.

The Laudato Si' Action Platform offers a strong authorising environment for generating consistency and coherence across CET. To maximise impact, a system-wide shared vision derived from Laudato Si' needs to be balanced with recognition of complexities and the possibility for place-based adaptation to local contexts and needs.

Recommendation 1:

Use A Call to Care for Country in the Laudato Si' Action Platform to collaboratively develop a shared vision balanced with local enactment.

The following are three **recommended strategies** for aligning the Laudato Si' Action Platform with a whole-system leadership approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success:

- 1.a. CET to prioritise the Call to Care for Country to work with schools and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Whole-school Spiritual Days to include days that respond to this call, enabling whole-staff on Country spiritual experiences and local actions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This engagement strengthens connections between students, schools, and communities as they come together to care for our common home.
- 1.b. CET to lead a collaborative process with school leaders to articulate a shared vision of state-wide agreed principles and approaches for improving the education outcomes of Tasmanian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (informed by the Laudato Si' Action Platform). Also, agreement about the need and scope for schools to have ownership of how to enact those principles and approaches in ways that are responsive to their local context.
- 1.c. School leaders to subsequently lead similar processes within their schools and communities.

Professional Learning, Advice and Knowledge-Sharing

The deep commitment of CET staff to supporting the learning and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was a highlight throughout the data. There is no doubt that staff across all levels agree on the importance of supporting these students, and they invest considerable time and energy to do the best they can.

It was clear there is significant expertise in some schools, leading to strong benefits for students. At the same time, many staff indicated they lacked confidence and were unsure they had the right knowledge and skills. They wanted more direction about what 'good practice' looks like and more sharing of 'what works'. Similarly, in relation to collaboration with the local Aboriginal community, there was a mix of experiences, levels of comfort, and knowledge about which experts and organisations were most suitable. Professional learning should align with the shared vision noted above, while also being sensitive to specific needs depending on staff roles and school contexts.

Recommendation 2:

CET to provide and coordinate a range of professional learning opportunities for staff.

The following are five **recommended strategies** that focus on quality professional learning provision, quality teaching, and workforce development:

- 2.a. CET to collate, map and provide—in a user-friendly (online) format—information about strategies for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Where relevant, indicate which students (e.g., school level, gender) and which staff the advice applies to.
- 2.b. CET to collate a database of highly regarded external experts, organisations, and resources to support the diverse work of building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success in schools.

- 2.c. CET to provide differentiated professional learning (PL) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander key teachers and coordinators, classroom teachers, teacher assistants, and leaders. CET to prioritise PL opportunities that focus on well-being and cultural responsiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Where feasible, staff should be provided with time-release for PL that aligns with AITSL standards.
- 2.d. CET to draw on the considerable 'in-house' expertise and create a framework for sharing narratives of success, both for work in schools and connections with community. These narratives should be accessible for classroom teachers and leaders. Practical examples of what other schools have done and how this links with research and/or policy directives can serve as inspiration to schools as well as demonstrate that CET takes system-level responsibility for improving student outcomes.
- 2.e. CET to align some of the professional learning opportunities with the broader CET discourse around reconciliation, implementing *Laudato Si'* and on-Country/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused spirituality days.

Data Quality

Ascertaining the impact of initiatives, such as the Student Success Grants, requires the right kind of data to be available. Currently, there are system-wide data gaps as well as inconsistencies in what data is available between schools and over time. Longitudinal data sets for all students in the system are needed for evidence-informed reform. Government reporting requirements could be fulfilled by utilising this database. By capturing all student data, comparative reporting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be generated.

Better data, as well as the capability and capacity to understand and analyse this data, are essential for knowing where to invest energy and resources, both at a system and a local level. Investment in this will generate longitudinal data sets for all students in the system for evidence-informed reform as well as support CET with reporting requirements, such as for the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and Closing the Gap.

Recommendation 3:

CET to develop a more systemic data platform to support accountability as well as evidence-informed decisions for future initiatives.

The following are **recommended strategies** for improving system-wide accessibility and use of data:

- 3.a. CET to develop a systematic, centralised approach to student data, collecting data at various levels (e.g., the individual student, the classroom, and the school). Collecting this data would provide a better picture of the individual student, enable a more rigorous evaluation and ability to fulfil reporting requirements of various learning and well-being initiatives that are implemented both across the system and within individual schools.
- 3.b. CET to collect data systematically over time for each student. While we would not suggest the data should be used to isolate individual progression, a centralised data system would support the realisation of systemic aspirations.

- 3.c. CET to collect data on students beyond academic progress. Collecting this data would enable tracking of CET systemic social justice outcomes for students – it is also a strong predictor of academic outcomes. To enable the collection of this data, there are various instruments currently available that could be employed. It is also possible to develop instruments for this purpose relevant to the educational context and aspirations of CET.
- 3.d. CET to make this data available in a user-friendly platform to central, regional, and school-based staff.
- 3.e. CET to expand capacity to create, manage and use this data at the central level through the appointment of additional staff; and expand capability state-wide through professional learning for regional and school staff.

Investment through Student Success Grants

The Student Success Grants have been very useful in putting the spotlight on support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They have increased staff awareness and knowledge and fostered cultural responsiveness and student well-being. It is also likely they have benefited student learning outcomes, but the evidence here is more mixed and more time may be needed to demonstrate this impact. The research highlighted that some approaches seemed particularly worthwhile for future Student Success Grants. It also pointed to aspects where the SSG process itself can be improved.

Recommendation 4:

CET to continue the Student Success Grants and adapt them to reduce burden and enhance potential impact.

The following **recommended strategies** aim to streamline the SSG application process and ensure resource use is targeted in key priority areas:

- 4.a. CET to provide clear selection criteria for future grant applications, ensuring they are aligned with evidence about what works well and with a system-wide shared vision, while also providing scope for flexibility and adaptation to local contexts.
- 4.b. CET to prioritise grant proposals that focus on well-being and cultural responsiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; or on purposeful local engagement initiatives involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community.
- 4.c. CET to allow expenditure that enhances inclusion (such as covering the cost of WWVP cards for Elders and community members to work in schools) and that enhances sustainability (such as professional learning of key staff who can then share their expertise through Professional Learning Communities or Communities of Practice).
- 4.d. CET to reduce the burden on schools, e.g. by providing a clear proforma for applications and reporting; extending grant duration; and providing schools with access to relevant data and expertise for using that data.

Vignette: Aboriginal Knowledge Sharers and Educators Portal

Recommendation 2 from this research referred to Professional Learning, Advice and Knowledge-Sharing. In particular, it recommended that Catholic Education Tasmania collate a database of highly regarded experts and resources (strategy 2b) as well as develop a way of sharing the considerable 'in house' expertise with colleagues within CET (strategy 2d).

Catholic Education Tasmania has already responded to these ideas, through the development of the Aboriginal Knowledge Sharers and Educators Portal (AKSEP).

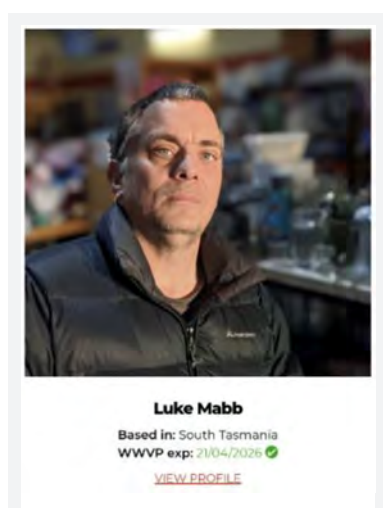
In its initial development the Portal focuses on strategy 2b; with strategy 2d to be incorporated into the Portal later. The Portal has information about knowledge sharers, including elders and artists. In addition to these people, the Portal also has information about Aboriginal businesses and links to external resources, for example related to cultural burning.

Catholic Education Tasmania staff can make a booking enquiry directly with a knowledge sharer; request support from the CET Education Officer: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education; or book via a local collective of Aboriginal people.

The portal can be searched:

1). By name, 2). By region (such as North West Tasmania; interstate), **3). By age group** (such as early childhood 0-4; teachers and educators), **4). By knowledge** (see image below).

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Aboriginal Dance & Performance | ☐ Kelp Work |
| ☐ Aboriginal Fishing Practices | ☐ Land Management |
| ☐ Aboriginal Hunting Practices | ☐ Mainland Australian Aboriginal Culture & Histories |
| ☐ Aboriginal Language History | ☐ Ochre |
| ☐ Aboriginal Spirituality | ☐ Religious Studies |
| ☐ Acknowledgement of Country | ☐ School Curriculum Content |
| ☐ Artist Talks | ☐ Shore Reading & Sea Country |
| ☐ Bark Rope Making | ☐ Skinning & Tanning |
| ☐ Basket Weaving & Fibre Work | ☐ Songwriting & Singing |
| ☐ Bush Food | ☐ Spear & Waddie Throwing |
| ☐ Bush Garden Design | ☐ Spear Making |
| ☐ Canoe Building | ☐ Staff Professional Development |
| ☐ Cape Barren Island History | ☐ Stolen Generation Awareness |
| ☐ Clapsticks Making | ☐ Stone Quarries |
| ☐ Communication Skills | ☐ Storytelling |
| ☐ Creation Stories & Storytelling | ☐ Student Organisation & Study Skills |
| ☐ Creative Writing | ☐ Tasmanian Aboriginal History |
| ☐ Cultural Burning | ☐ Torres Strait Islander Culture & Histories |
| ☐ Didgeridoo Performance | ☐ Traditional & Contemporary Aboriginal Food |
| ☐ Firestick Making | ☐ Twine Making |
| ☐ Guided Walks & Reading Country | ☐ Welcome to Country |
| ☐ Hut Building & Wind-breaks | ☐ Youth Leadership |
| ☐ Jewellery Making | |
| ☐ Kangaroo & Possum Cloaks | |



For each sharer, the Portal has a 'thumbnail' with a photo, their location, Working With Vulnerable People registration, and a link to a more complete profile (see example on left).

The full profile has detailed information about the background, expertise, experience and availability of the knowledge sharer.

The Portal promises to become a highly valuable resource.

Introduction

1.1. The Project

In late 2019 the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office commissioned researchers from Deakin University, Centre for Research for Educational Impact (REDI), and the University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, to conduct research on how to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within Catholic Education Tasmania. A specific focus was on the Student Success Grant initiative which involved some schools receiving additional funding from the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office to achieve such improved outcomes.

There are 38 Catholic Schools and Colleges in Tasmania. Seventeen of these schools from around the state received a Student Success Grant in 2019/2020. The main purpose of the Student Success Grants was to support schools to plan for and ensure sustained and measurable educational improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools across Tasmania. About 1000 of the approximately total 16,000 students in Catholic schools in Tasmania identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In the schools that received a Student Success Grant, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled ranged between 7 and 109, representing between 1.8% – 37% of the school population.

The research involved a literature review (Auld et al., 2021), survey of school/community leaders from 22 schools, analysis of CET student data; case studies with 10 schools; and collaborative experiences in leadership workshops. All data collection was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committees of Deakin University and the University of Tasmania.

This report provides findings based on detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of all project data. To enhance readability and usefulness, the report has purposely been kept concise. Key findings are highlighted in bold font. The report concludes with recommendations for the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office.

1.2. Contextual Information

1.2.1. COVID-19

When the funding for Student Success Grants was allocated in 2019 and this research was commissioned, COVID-19 and the interruptions this posed to schooling, travel, and everyday life, were not anticipated. As well as limiting travel in the project, schools were impacted by some closures and changed conditions, which affected their delivery of the Student Success Grants.

1.2.2. Laudato Si': A Call to Care for Country

In November 2021, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference released their Social Justice Statement, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, in the hope that the statements would 'ground and inspire faithful and effective responses by the whole Catholic community' (2021, p. 3). They also immediately signed up to the Laudato Si' Action Platform on behalf of the Australian Catholic Church and its institutions.

This seven-year commitment to the Laudato Si' Action Platform has significant potential for a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success across CET. This positive impact being due to Pope Francis's focus on listening to First Nations people as echoed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on the importance of listening to and acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in caring for Country.

As well as the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, many orders have signed up to the Laudato Si' Action Platform, committing their schools to act. The Salesians and the Sisters of Mercy have recently signed up, and it is anticipated that the orders governing all Tasmanian Catholic schools will also sign up to the platform.

This creates a shared set of spiritual actions, which will profoundly influence relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members if the actions are followed with the spirit of the Pope's words and the commitment to listening to and acting on the advice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities envisaged by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This provides opportunities for staff and student spiritual development through environmental action in caring for Country, and also for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be given leadership responsibilities in their local community which will enhance respect from their peers.

The Literature Review

The literature review for this project was completed in 2021 and has been published in full by CET (Auld et al., 2021). A key source for the literature review was the work by the Aboriginal Voices Project (Lowe et al., 2019; Moodie, Vass & Lowe, 2020), focused on issues affecting the underachievement of Indigenous students in Australia as well as possible solutions. The findings from our literature review build on the ten fields of research identified by the Aboriginal Voices Project to develop a practical model that can be used in schools to focus on supports for student success. The scope of the review was to provide teachers and school leaders with an understanding of evidenced-based practices and the multiple facets of practice that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

The literature review is framed around ten supports that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. The ten supports documented in the literature review are shown in Figure 1.

Please note that in the original set of ten supports, one was called 'cultural safety and wellbeing', as per Figure 1. This term was also used in the survey (see section 3.3). Catholic Education Tasmania prefers the term 'cultural sensitivity and wellbeing', and therefore we have used that throughout the text of this report. For more information about all ten supports please see the full Literature Review report (Auld et al., 2021).



The ten supports identified in the literature review work together, and provide the necessary pre-conditions, to foster student success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The ten supports are non-hierarchical and are all necessary, but not sufficient in isolation, to promote success.

For more information, please see the full Literature Review report (Auld et al., 2021).

Findings from the Survey

The survey captured qualitative and quantitative data from 22 of the 38 Catholic schools within CET. The surveys were completed by a school leader and community member(s) working together, or individually by a school leader. The aim of the survey was twofold; to evaluate the activities and initiatives undertaken by schools within CET that were connected to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education funding submissions and to explore the perceptions of school leaders about ideas from the literature review.

The survey sample was largely representative of the Catholic and broader Tasmanian education context across a range of indicators, including the percentage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population, the average student enrolment of schools, and a range of geographic and socio-economic contexts.

3.1. Categorisation of Activities and Initiatives

In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked to categorise their existing activities and initiatives— that were designed to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success—according to the main priority areas of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (NATSI) Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015). The NATSI Education Strategy priority areas are:

- Leadership, Quality Teaching, and Workforce Development;
- Culture and Identity;
- Partnerships;
- Attendance;
- Transition Points, Including Pathways to Post-School Options;
- School and Child Readiness; and
- Literacy and Numeracy.

Some of the key findings from the categorisation part of the survey are provided in the bulleted list below:

- The majority of activities were connected to Culture and Identity (64 of 96) and Attendance (Engagement) (58 of 94), whereas Transition Points (27 of 94) and School and Child Readiness (26 of 94) received relatively fewer identifications.
- Culture and Identity activities were mostly cultural programmes for students (54 of 64). Cultural programmes for teachers (37 of 64) were relatively underrepresented compared to cultural programming for students.
- Attendance initiatives were predominately identified as cultural programmes (48 of 58) and there was less focus on targeted attendance strategies (16 of 58).
- The Aboriginal Key Teacher (AKT) role and release time for Aboriginal Student Support Teachers (ASSTs) (40 of 55) were identified by schools as key to building Leadership, Quality Teaching, and Workforce Development.
- For Partnerships, the majority of activities were collaborations with local organisations (42 of 50). Parent engagement programmes (19 of 50) were relatively underrepresented as a partnerships strategy.
- Targeted intervention programmes (30 of 38) were the dominant activity type identified under Literacy and Numeracy.

3.2. Findings from the Written Responses

The survey report also included an analysis of written responses. Survey participants were asked to elaborate on the participation of non-Indigenous students in activities targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success; the reportable outcomes of their activities; how the activities supported achievement, promoted well-being, and fostered student engagement and student retention; how and why the activities were initiated; how Indigenous Knowledges were incorporated into the activities; and finally, how the activities contributed to the cultural connectedness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members.

The written responses in the survey were organised into themes and further classified into the NATSI Education Strategy priority areas. Some of the major findings from the written section of the survey are presented below under each of the NATSI Education Strategy headings.

3.2.1. Culture and Identity

- Respondents pointed to the importance of spaces (e.g., being on Country) to support student well-being and belonging, which was said to sustain and support strong cultural identities.
- Responses suggested that for many students identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander was complex and this required a culturally connected environment to ensure students were proud of their identities and cultural heritage.
- The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was considered essential to helping embed Indigenous Knowledges. However, several respondents also indicated that their activities did not involve Indigenous Knowledges.

- Several respondents spoke to the need to build the professional knowledge of staff and to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge across the school.

3.2.2. Attendance

- Strong relationships were positioned as essential to student engagement and attendance by a number of respondents.
- Respondents indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feeling valued and experiencing a sense of belonging at school drove engagement and attendance outcomes.
- Several respondents cited ongoing complexities and challenges with not only having students attend school but having them engage with learning while at school. Engaging activities were seen as important by some respondents to help overcome these challenges.
- Most schools adopted broader participation models for their activities by involving both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students.

3.2.3. Leadership, Quality Teaching, and Workforce Development

- There was a strong focus among responses for the need for ongoing professional learning for teachers and school staff, while some suggested there were challenges in finding suitable services for professional learning provision (e.g., limited availability).
- Teachers were perceived as making attitudinal (i.e., positive dispositions, willingness to engage etc.) and pragmatic (i.e., planning units of work, supporting NAIDOC week etc.) contributions to activities, while the contributions of school leaders were seen as more symbolic (i.e., modelling deep engagement with true histories etc.) and administrative (i.e., resource allocation etc.)
- Responses suggested a perception of 'risk' for staff when engaging with Aboriginal families and community members, where staff were worried about causing offence or making mistakes.

3.2.4. Partnerships

- External organisations provided schools with access to vital place-based resources (physical spaces for carrying out activities) and human resources (people with cultural knowledge to support the schools' programmes and activities).
- Some respondents identified success engaging their local Aboriginal communities, while others cited this as a future growth area within the partnerships priority.
- Challenges to accessing and finding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons to support activities was a significant challenge for several respondents. A lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within some schools was perceived as another challenge.

3.2.5. Literacy and Numeracy

- The effective use of learning data was mentioned as integral to improving learning and constructing learning interventions.
- Several respondents spoke to an expansive understanding of achievement in school that extended beyond measurable improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes and foreshadowed the importance of students' sense of well-being and belonging as key aspects of 'achievement'.

3.2.6. School and Child Readiness

- Across the written responses, there were few direct references to school and child readiness activities and initiatives.
- 1.4.7 Transition Points and Post-School Options
- This priority was not a strong focus within the written responses of the survey; however, some responses did speak generally about the need to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with pathways to further education and training.

3.2.7. Transition Points and Post-School Options

- This priority was not a strong focus within the written responses of the survey; however, some responses did speak generally about the need to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with pathways to further education and training.

3.2.8. Additional Themes

- The importance of relationships and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in the school was consistently connected to cultural responsiveness.
- Several respondents indicated an interest in system-wide initiatives and activities to support their local programmes and offerings.
- Racism and racist attitudes within and beyond the school were cited as ongoing barriers and challenges.

3.3. Survey Discussion

3.3.1. Ratings of Perceived Importance

The survey discussion integrates an analysis of the themes emerging from the written survey responses with empirical data collected about the perceived importance survey respondents placed on the ten supports identified in the literature review. Figure 2 below depicts the ratings of perceived importance for each of the ten supports.

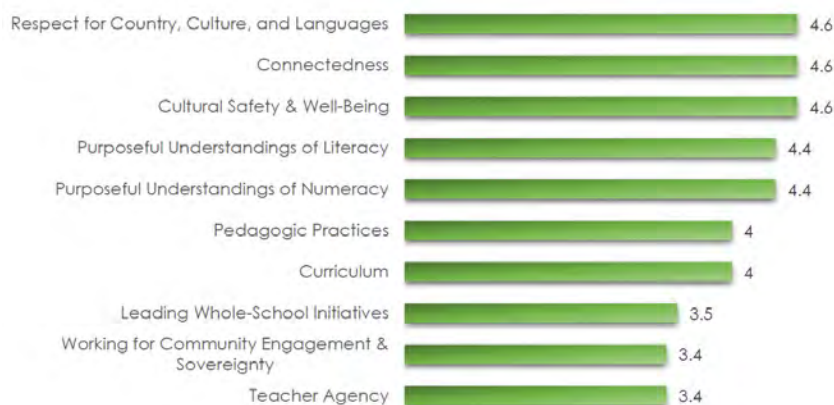


Figure 2: Perceived Importance of Factors Impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Success in Schools.

The results from this part of the survey suggest that survey respondents rated “Respect for Country, Culture and Languages”, “Connectedness” and “Cultural Sensitivity and Well-Being”³ as the most important.

The variance of perceived importance of factors is captured in Figure 3 below.

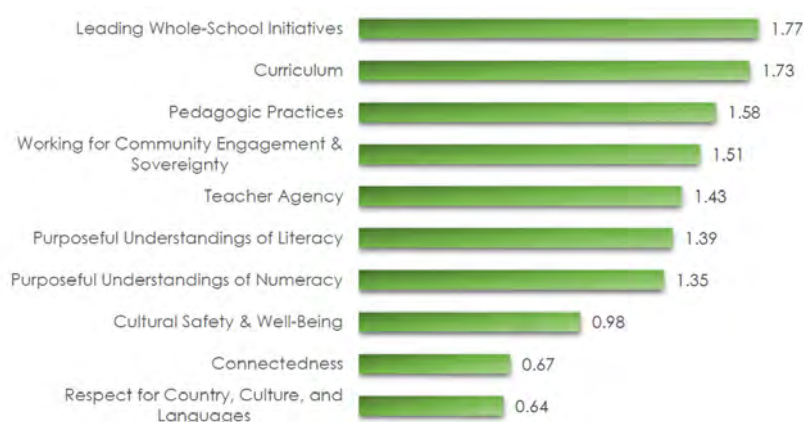


Figure 3: Variance of Perceived Importance of Factors that Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Success in Schools

Figure 3 shows that the ratings of perceived importance given to the supports “Respect for Country, Culture and Languages”; “Connectedness”; and “Cultural Sensitivity and Well-Being”⁴ were the least varied.

^{3 & 4} In the survey (and therefore in Figure 2 & 3) the term used was ‘Cultural Safety and Wellbeing’. At the request of CET we are using the term ‘Cultural Sensitivity and Wellbeing’ in the text of this report.

In comparing the results from both figures, the first significant point of comparison is the similarity of ratings given to greatest significance (Figure 2) and least variance (Figure 3) – i.e., what all schools perceived as most important to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

Three factors present as both most important and widest agreement among schools:

- (i) Respect for Country, Culture and Language,
- (ii) Connectedness,
- (iii) Cultural Sensitivity and Well-Being,

This group of three highly valued factors speaks emphatically to the importance schools place on cultural responsiveness.

3.3.2. Professional Learning

Professional learning figured prominently amongst matters of concern for survey respondents connecting directly to “Teacher Agency”, “Pedagogic Practices”, “Curriculum”, and “Leading Whole-School Initiatives” factors.

Across the majority of returns, there were strong calls for more professional learning.

The responses recognised classroom teachers and support staff such as Teaching Assistants as staff most likely to benefit from professional learning. However, recognition was given to the need for all staff within schools to receive professional learning to enable a whole-school response to engage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities.

3.3.3. Engagement: Parents and Community

Most survey respondents agreed more options should be available involving cultural awareness activities that support education.

But this acknowledgement leads to questions regarding the low ratings of perceived importance given to “Leading Whole-School Initiatives” and “Working for Community Engagement and Sovereignty” (see Figure 2). From the survey responses, it is not possible to answer definitively how it is that these factors were rated second and third lowest on perceived importance supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. It is possible that schools consider they are already working—via whole-school initiatives—in culturally responsive ways, thereby engaging community and supporting sovereignty. The cluster reported above lends support to this suggestion. It is also possible that respondents did consider these supports important, but by virtue of being asked to rank them, some supports inevitably ended up at the lower end. However, the reported absence of parent and community engagement policy and plans signals the potential existence of a figurative fence separating schools from their communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Performance

4.1. CET Student Data

CET collects many forms of data across different domains of student success. Table 1 below shows the different forms of data collected by CET.

	Data	Grade	Date/s
Academic Outcomes	NAPLAN	3, 5, 7 & 9	2008-2019
	Performance Indicators in Primary Schools	P	2012-2019
	Australian Early Development Census	K/P	2009-2018
	Kinder Development Checklist	K	Unknown
	Australian Curriculum Framework	K-10	Unknown
	Progressive Assessment Testing (PAT)	K-10	2014-20221
	ACER General Ability Test	2-10	2019-2021
	TASC	11-12	2015-2021
Well-Being & Engagement	Rumble's Quest	3-6	Unknown
	Student Attendance	K-12	Unknown
	Student Behavioural Issues	K-12	Unknown
Demographics	Student Age	K-12	Unknown
	Student Grade	K-12	Unknown
	Student First Nations Status	K-12	Unknown
	Student LBOTE Status	K-12	Unknown
	Parent's highest level of education	K-12	Unknown
	Parent's employment status and sector	K-12	Unknown

Table 1: Data Collected by Tasmanian Catholic Schools and Colleges.

For CET data, there is a contrast between what is collected and what is accessible on a system-wide basis. Whilst some data, such as NAPLAN and the results of Progressive Achievement Testing (PAT), are reported centrally to CET; other data, such as student attendance, behaviour, and demographic information (e.g., parent education and occupation), are often held within individual schools.

The data collected by CET is somewhat fragmented. For example, a student's NAPLAN record is held in one database, their PAT results in another, their attendance and behavioural records in another, and their demographic characteristics in another etc. **This fragmentation makes any in-depth analysis difficult** as it requires data on individual students to be matched across data sets for comparisons to be made (e.g., the impact of attendance on literacy and numeracy).

Table 2 below documents the data that were available to analyse for this report. The table includes the breakdown of data availability between Shared Funded and Direct Funded schools⁵, whether these data are stored centrally, and the degree of difficulty to link the data sets.

The data available limited the scope of the analysis that could be conducted in this project.

	Data	Available	Source and Linkage		
			Central	Non-Central	Linking Effort
Shared Funded Schools	NAPLAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
	PAT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
	Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
	Attendance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low
	Behaviour	No	No	Yes	Unknown
Direct Funded Schools	NAPLAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
	PAT	No	Yes	Yes	High
	Demographics	No	No	Yes	High
	Attendance	No	No	Yes	High
	Behaviour	No	No	No	Very High

Table 2: Comparative Data Availability

⁵ The Direct Funded Schools comprise 10 Colleges funded under a direct allocation method; the Shared Funded Schools are made up of 27 schools (of which 24 are primary schools and 3 have a secondary component) funded under a shared budget model.

4.1.1. Academic Outcomes

This analysis uses two years (2018–2019) combined NAPLAN data to provide a picture of the relative performance of Indigenous students currently studying in Tasmania’s Catholic Schools from years 3–9. The academic outcomes of 9930 students within the Catholic Educational System are captured and compared—707 Indigenous students and 9223 non-Indigenous students.

The performance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous attending Catholic Education Tasmania schools was analysed across all domains of NAPLAN: reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and numeracy. In Figure 4 below, the scale score gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in each NAPLAN domain and across each age grade, are presented. For example, it shows that the largest gap is for Reading in Year 5 (36.51).

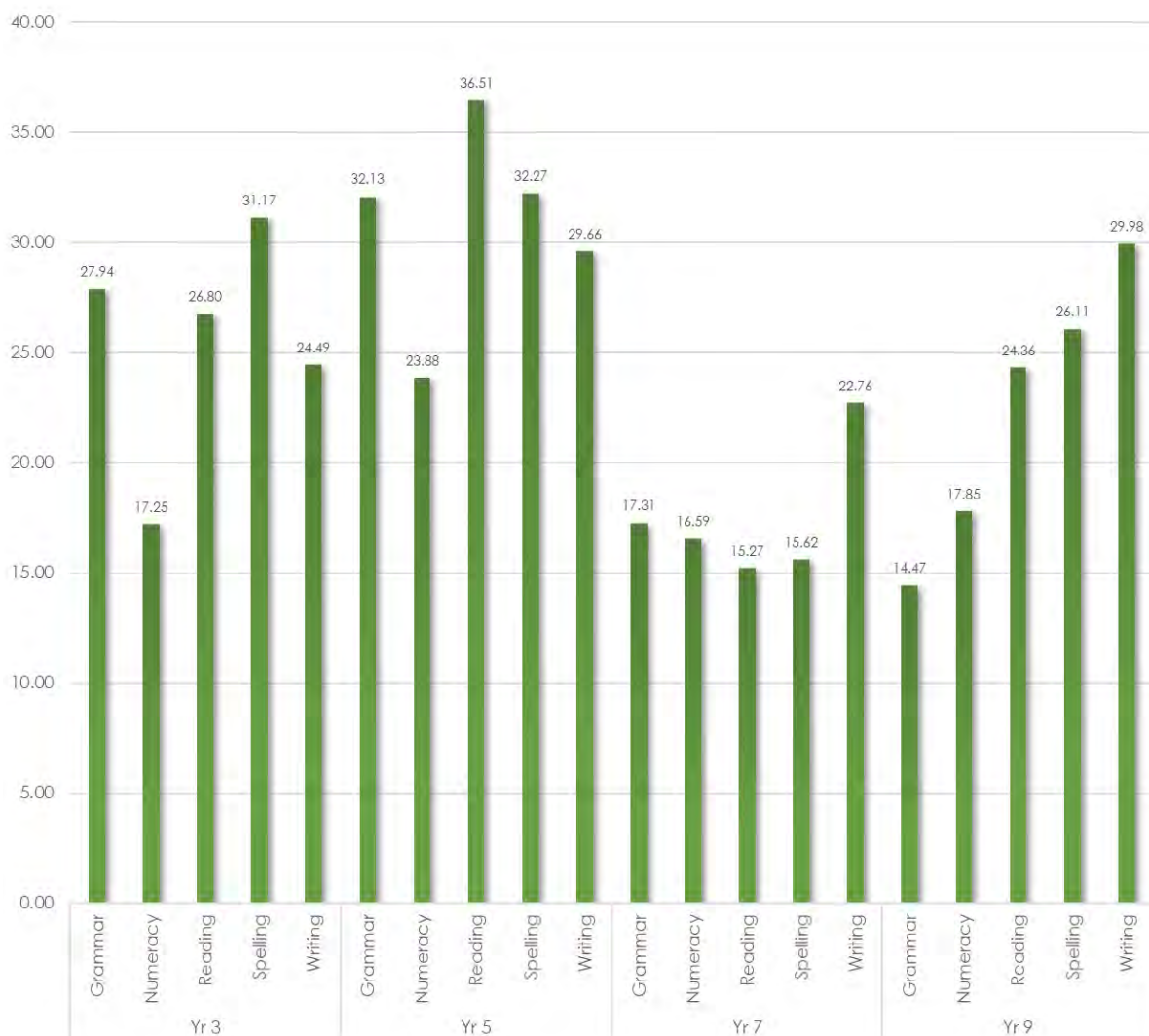


Figure 4: NAPLAN Scale Score Gap by Year Level and Domain (2018 & 2019 Combined).

Gaps in scale scores exist across all NAPLAN domains and grade levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Tasmania’s Catholic Schools, with the non-Indigenous students outperforming their Indigenous counterparts in these metrics.

A few results, however, are worthy of further examination and go against expected trends. For example, the scale score gap reduces for the Year 7 cohort coming out of primary school. This result could potentially signal the improved performance of Indigenous students, or alternatively, the diminished performance of non-Indigenous students as they make the transition into high school. The result could also be impacted by students transitioning into or out of the Catholic Educational system in Tasmania.

Although the scale score gaps in Figure 4 show a disparity in NAPLAN outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the gap is less than that observed at state and national levels.

On average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Tasmania’s Catholic schools are roughly one NAPLAN band behind their non-Indigenous counterparts.

4.1.2. Attendance

Drawing on Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data from 2019, the average attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the CET system was less than two percent. Averaging the attendance of all students to make a comparison did not reflect the true disparity in attendance rates because higher attending students were able to compensate for lower attending students.

Using ACARA’s attendance levels—the proportion of students who attended more than 90% of school days in a given year as a percentage of the total school days for a year—indicated a gap of 6.72 percentage points, as seen in Figure 5 below. Note that attendance *level* is not the same as attendance *rate*.

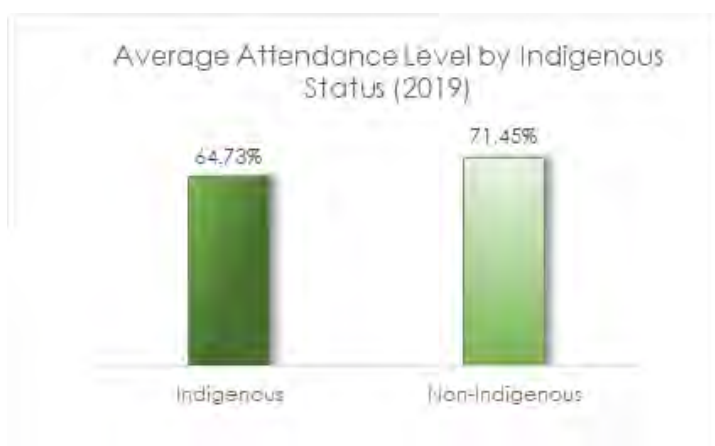


Figure 5: CET Attendance Levels by Indigenous Status (2019)

Note: Attendance level refers to the proportion of students who attended more than 90% of school days in a given year as a percentage of the total school days for a year.

When interpreted in combination with average attendance rates, the slightly larger gap in attendance levels suggests that there is more variance within Indigenous attendance than non-Indigenous attendance.

Drawing on data from Shared Funded schools exclusively, a comparative analysis of attendance data between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across the CET system provides more insight into the gap highlighted above in Figure 5.

For authorised absences—absences with a legitimate reason, supporting evidence, and are approved by the school—Indigenous students are approximately absent one day per year more than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

For unauthorised absences—absences that are either unexplained or the explanation is deemed unacceptable—Indigenous students are also absent from school for approximately one more day per year than non-Indigenous students.

For enforced absences—those brought about because of exclusion or suspension—the gap is insignificant.

4.1.3. Retention

The apparent retention rate is an indicative measure of the number of full-time school students in a designated year level of schooling as a percentage of their respective cohort group in a base year. The overall Year 10–12 retention rate for Tasmania’s Catholic schools is considerably lower than schools operating within the government sector, as shown in Figure 6 below (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2020).

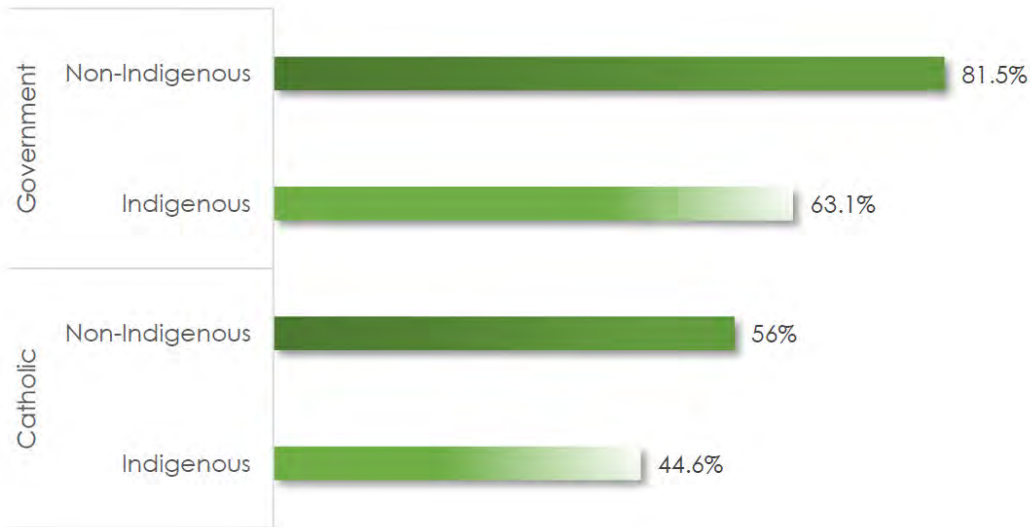


Figure 6: Year 10–12 Apparent Retention Rates by Indigenous Status and School Sector (2020)

Although this gap may appear concerning, it is important to recognise the discrepancy is likely due to students transferring between school sectors. In the government sector there are 8 colleges that provide senior secondary education, and most government high schools now also offer Year 11 and 12 (although their senior secondary cohorts tend to be small). Within the Catholic sector there are currently 4—although many Catholic schools are in the process of extending into senior secondary education. When comparing the two systems and their relative retention gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, the government sector has a gap of 18.4 percentage points, while the Catholic system has a gap of 11.4 percentage points. This discrepancy suggests that while there are opportunities to further improve retention for Indigenous students in the Catholic system, the system is performing relatively well when compared to the government sector.

4.2. Modelling Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

The purpose of this section is multi-faceted. Firstly, we aim to create and test a range of statistical models to empirically identify whether a relationship between cultural sensitivity, cultural responsiveness, and improved educational outcomes exists for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students currently studying in Tasmania’s Catholic schools. Secondly, we aim to draw on the most appropriate model to empirically identify the nature of this relationship, and where possible, draw out potential complexities.

4.2.1. Method

We have adopted Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to construct a statistical model where highly complex causal relationships between sets of observed and underlying variables are analysed whilst simultaneously accounting for measurement error. This method can assess the direction and statistical significance of relationships between multiple variables simultaneously which reduces the amount of potential error in the analysis. It can hypothesise, and to some extent test, causal assumptions between sets of variables. Through SEM, we can examine how well a model fits the data, and test alternative models to determine which model is the most suitable—a useful feature when evaluating the temporal relationships between variables i.e., which variable influences which. A model produced through SEM can be adjusted and improved through the addition or removal of ‘paths’ with the aim of creating an ideal ‘fit’.

4.2.2. Data

Progressive Achievement Testing (PAT) results for mathematics and reading were employed to measure academic outcomes. The data sample was drawn from CET databases and included 203 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from years 1–9 (inclusive) across 11 schools during 2020. Engagement was measured through CET student attendance data, in particular, the percentage of a student’s attendance measured in minutes per year. Data related to the “ten supports” was collected as part of the survey for this project. The ratings of perceived importance for the ten supports, as perceived by school

leaders and/or community members, (see Figure 2 in the section Ratings of Perceived Importance), were used as indicators of school priorities. The ‘ten supports’ variables were reduced through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and two variables were constructed: cultural responsiveness, and curriculum and pedagogy.⁶

4.2.3. The Statistical Models

It is standard practice to convey SEM analysis visually with ‘path diagrams’. These are effectively statistical flowcharts where rectangles represent variables, single-headed arrows (paths) represent causal hypotheses to be tested, and double-headed arrows (co-variances) represent non-causal hypotheses (i.e., theorising that the variables are related but the complexity of the relationship precludes the ability to theorise which variable influences which).

We tested two models in this analysis. The first model tested multiple hypotheses:

- The ratings of importance placed on cultural responsiveness variables and curricular/pedagogical variables by a school (school leaders and community members) had a direct influence on the attendance and educational outcomes (as measured through PAT reading and mathematics scores) of Indigenous students.
- The ratings of importance placed on cultural responsiveness and curricular/pedagogical variables by a school (school leaders and community members) had an indirect influence on the educational outcomes (as measured through PAT reading and mathematics scores) of Indigenous students through their influence on attendance.
- Socio-economic status (SES) influences the attendance and educational outcomes of Indigenous students.
- Ability in reading and mathematics (as measured through PAT scores) are closely associated with one another.

The first model is shown below in Figure 7, and the alternative model is shown in Figure 8.

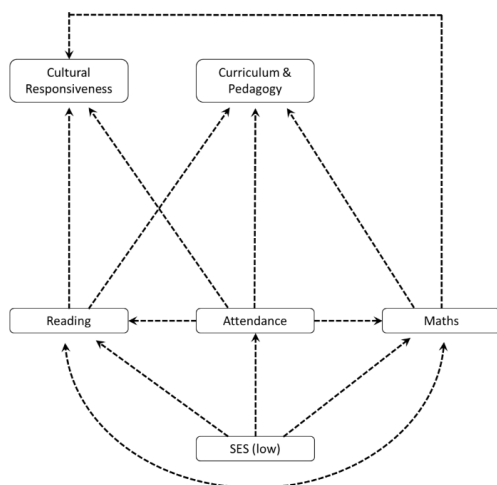


Figure 7: Hypothesised Model

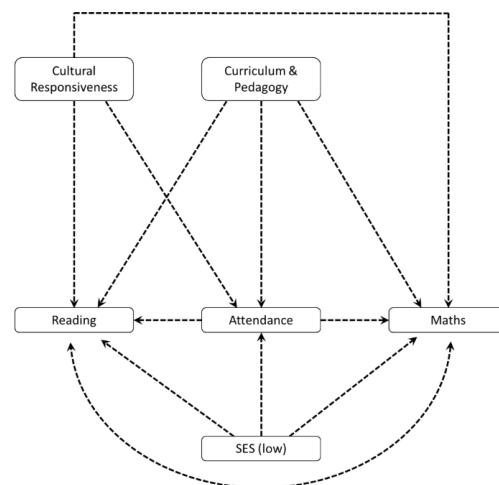


Figure 8: Alternative Model

⁶ For more information about the methodology please see Appendix A & B

The alternative model tested the hypothesis:

An inverse relationship (note the direction of arrows in the Figure 8 above) exists between educational outcomes, attendance and the importance placed on cultural responsiveness and curricular/pedagogical variables by a school (school leaders and community members)— in essence, that the attendance and educational outcomes of Indigenous students may influence a school's perception of the importance of cultural responsiveness and curriculum and pedagogy.

4.2.4. Results

The hypothesised model was an excellent fit for the data. The alternative model, where educational outcomes and attendance were hypothesised to influence the importance placed on cultural responsiveness, curriculum, and pedagogy, was extremely poor.

Based on these results, it was safe to conclude that cultural responsiveness and curriculum and pedagogy are far more likely to influence educational outcomes and attendance than the other way around.

The final model (shown below in Figure 9) demonstrated particularly high predictive power given the relatively limited number of variables. The model suggests socio-economic status, cultural responsiveness, and curriculum and pedagogy are predicting 27% of the variance in the educational outcomes and attendance of the Indigenous students in the sample.

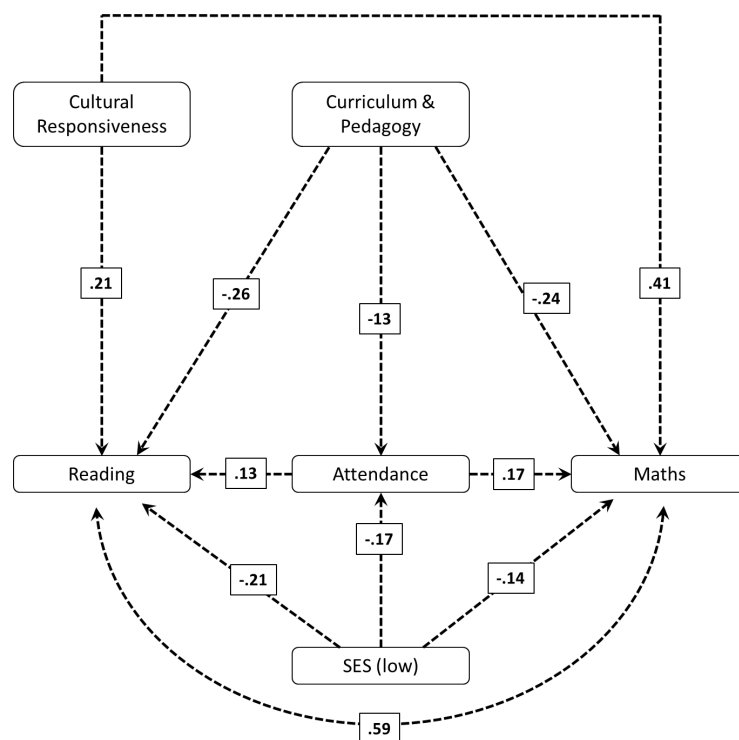


Figure 9: Standardised Solution for Hypothesised Model

There was a very strong correlation between reading and mathematics (.59); lower socio-economic status had a moderate negative influence on reading (-.21), a moderate negative influence on attendance (-.17), and a smaller negative influence on mathematics (-.14). Also as expected, higher levels of attendance had a positive influence on both reading (.13) and mathematics (.17), however, these coefficients are somewhat smaller than those commonly found in the literature.

Cultural Responsiveness had a moderate positive influence on reading (.21) and a strong positive influence on mathematics (.41). Conversely, Curriculum & Pedagogy had a moderate negative influence on reading (-.26) a moderate negative influence on mathematics (-.24) and a smaller negative influence on attendance (-.13).

These results suggest that as the importance placed on cultural responsiveness increases, the educational outcomes of Indigenous children increase.

Conversely, as the importance placed on Curriculum & Pedagogy increases, the educational outcomes of Indigenous children decrease.

4.2.5. Interpretation

The results above suggest that as school leaders and community members place emphasis on cultural responsivity (e.g., Cultural sensitivity and Well-Being, Respect for Country, Culture, and languages, etc.) attendance, literacy and numeracy outcomes improve.

Conversely (and somewhat counterintuitively), emphasis on curriculum and pedagogy was negatively related to attendance, reading and mathematics outcomes.

This could suggest that when schools are too narrow in their focus on performance inputs, Indigenous students do not improve their learning performance, and potentially, go backwards.

At this juncture, the conclusions drawn through the SEM analysis are preliminary and more research is needed to explore the relationships between engagement, student outcomes and cultural responsivity.

4.2.6. Limitations

The following bullet points outline the limitations of the SEM methodology and data used in the context of this research. While the results discussed above are important, further research remains necessary.

The variables “cultural responsiveness” and “curriculum and pedagogy” represent the survey respondents’ perceptions of the importance of each of the ten supports. These ratings do not necessarily represent what is occurring within schools.

Although attendance has been employed as a 'proxy' for engagement by several studies, it does not provide a complete picture. Academically disengaged students often attend school at a similar rate to that of their more engaged peers and a poor attendance rate does not necessarily equate to disengagement—there are many legitimate reasons why a student's attendance may lag behind others.

There is strong evidence that a range of other psychosocial factors influence engagement and academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children e.g., motivation.

There is a range of contextual factors at the school/community level that could influence the ratings of perceived importance given by school leaders and community members to the ten supports.

Findings from the Case Studies

5.1. Introduction

Our aims in these case studies are twofold. First, we evaluate the implementation of Student Success Grants (SSGs) in the sample schools. Secondly, we highlight the diverse practices embedded within CET schools that are connected to, but not necessarily reliant upon, the SSGs. In our sample, we have included both SSG recipient and non-recipient schools. By including schools that did not receive an SSG we can highlight instances where the SSG provided added value beyond the existing practices. In this summary, we have amalgamated the light-touch case studies and detailed case studies into one case study section.

5.2. Case Study Methodology

Three initial 'light touch' case studies were conducted in late 2020, and seven more detailed case studies in 2021 (see Table 3). In total 49 staff were interviewed and two yarning circles conducted with parents/carers and community members connected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at the school. In addition, a large amount of documentation was analysed, including: SSG applications, personal learning plans, newsletters, and in some cases NAPLAN and PAT testing data.

Type of Case Study	Student Success Grant	Data
Light Touch	Yes	2 staff interviews
Light Touch	Yes	2 staff interviews
Light Touch	No	1 staff interview
Detailed	Yes	9 staff interviews
		Documentation, including SSG application; 2019, 2020, 2021 annual plans
Detailed	No	7 staff interviews
		Documentation
Detailed	Yes	4 staff interviews
		Documentation
Detailed	Yes	5 staff interviews
		Documentation
Detailed	No	6 staff interviews
		Documentation
Detailed	Yes	8 staff interviews
		Yarning circle with community
		Documentation
Detailed	Yes	5 staff interviews
		Yarning circle with community
		Documentation

Table 3: Case Study Data

All interview data was reviewed and categorised within the NATSI Education Strategy priority areas. When reviewing the interview data across the sample schools, we cross-referenced the SSG applications' descriptions of activities to evaluate the connections between the applications and practice in schools.

5.3. Findings

In this section, we present amalgamated case study findings using the NATSI Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015) framework. Relatively few findings relate to the two NATSI Education Strategy priority areas of 'Transition Points Including Pathways to Post-School Options (Secondary)' and 'School and Child Readiness (Primary)'. Therefore, we combined these two priority areas under the abridged heading Transitions and Pathways.

5.3.1. Culture and Identity

Schools supported connections with culture and identity by nurturing links between students and the community and, to a lesser extent, through the curriculum.

One SSG recipient school reflected on how they encouraged successful alumni to maintain links with the school community:

I mean [alumni] openly talk about how difficult it was for them at school being told they didn't exist: "there were no Aboriginals in Tasmania" and so that's the life they led through their whole schooling life and for their young [children] to now bring them back into the fold and get them feeling comfortable about identifying has just been fantastic. (School leader)

All participant schools went on excursions to cultural sites, museums and learning centres, fostering respect for Country and links with the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Schools embedded respect for Country in two ways: leveraging access to bushland and natural reserves and telling true histories. However, many schools did not have access to bushland, so these schools demonstrated respect for Country by developing connections with community members around the school and through excursions.

Within the classroom, some educators demonstrated respect for language by embedding language in the curriculum by engaging with art, music, and literature. Across all schooling levels, integrating understandings of Aboriginal histories and cultures was influenced by both teacher agency and school leadership.

"[It is] not overtly [present], not unless you bring a text into the classroom which would look at that. So not in the curriculum documents. It's more I guess; it tries to give you the flexibility to tailor what you use in the classroom to your student body if that makes sense. So yeah, not probably so much." – (Teacher)

However, focusing on one SSG recipient school, two participants shared that they had ‘struggled a lot with the curriculum’ and had attended professional learning, but neither informant shared tangible examples of how they were embedding culture and identity into their curriculum, suggesting staff need more support.

5.3.2. Partnerships

Collaborating with communities and cultivating partnerships involved engagement with parents, community organisations, and Elders to build a community of support around the school to assist with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success. Some key networks of partnerships emerged from the SSG applications and CET annual plans and budgets (see Appendix C).

Case study schools demonstrated how they were working for community collaboration and partnerships in three ways:

- **removing structural challenges,**
- **engaging with multiple perspectives from community, and**
- **encouraging community to view the school grounds as a space where they are welcome to practice culture.**

The importance of authentic connections was confirmed by a teacher:

“Elders and community members] will come in and do performances or discuss, with the kids, different things, so I guess we’re using their understanding, so it’s coming from the source rather than through us, you know what I mean, which I think is more authentic anyway, and they’re quite open to that, which is great.” – Teacher

One SSG application focused on engaging with community members, building stronger partnerships with parents, and providing a bridge between the school and community service organisations. This part of the school’s application was unsupported by CET, and an amendment was made to focus exclusively on a student learning initiative.

5.3.3. Attendance

One SSG school supported attendance and engagement through a specific tutoring programme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to work with teachers in small groups or one-on-one. For some schools, attendance was not an explicit focus within SSG applications and, in practice, **interviewees rarely spoke about attendance issues**. One school highlighted that attendance is a consideration for some students, but those students weren’t necessarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and the school leader said that “attendance is not a problem”.

One interviewee spoke about the importance of developing relationships with parents and caregivers when working with students who are having attendance issues.

“So, I mean, some data will tell you one thing, but it doesn't tell you the whys, so talk to the families about the whys. An absentee chart will tell you one thing, but if you actually talk to all the families, there could be really good reasons why that looks like that.” – School leader

This suggests that schools are well served when they address ongoing attendance issues in a relationally orientated manner. Engaging with families/ caregivers can extend beyond seeking information about issues (e.g., attendance) and can involve partnerships where parents/caregivers are equal partners when creating solutions to school-related issues, such as attendance or engagement.

Several schools spoke to the importance of cultural sensitivity and well-being as key aspects of engagement and, by extension, attendance.

“I think well-being's so important for everything really, I'd probably say that's, yeah if [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] haven't got that sense of safety and well-being, then it's really hard to do a lot of other things with them... Yeah well safety everywhere, but being proud to say, you know well this is me, this is where I'm from, and I'd probably go cultural safety and well-being.” – Teacher

5.3.4. Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy support and intervention was a dominant focus across all student success grant applications. Schools provided teacher training in instructional approaches, employed teacher assistants, and gave one-on-one support as strategies to help improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy performance on a range of identified standardised tests. Most SSG applications targeted quantifiable improvements in the literacy performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There was also evidence of individual teachers striving to construct meaningful and purposeful literacy learning experiences for their students that engaged in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and cultures.

Literacy skills, on the other hand, were a strong focus for schools targeting improved literacy outcomes through instructional interventions supported by SSGs:

“A lot of the [instructional package involves] ... the sounds that each letter makes, ... and blending them to make the words and that sort of thing. And he was regularly sounding out with the letter names instead, so if he saw a cat he'd say C-A-T instead. And I'd have to remind him every session that just when you sound it out, we have to use the letter sounds because it makes it so much easier.” – Teacher Assistant

Some teachers and support staff saw the benefit of these instructional packages because they believed them to represent best practice.

While some sample schools focused their SSGs on literacy interventions to improve learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there was evidence, that in practice, the benefit of these programmes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was muted. This muted success could be attributed to the fact some schools did not use Indigeneity as a category for determining who received student support.

Numeracy was a broad focus for several schools in their SSG applications.

One school had a strong focus in their SSG on building students' understanding of key numeracy concepts as a strategy for enhancing mathematical thinking. The intervention, directed toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, was premised on pre and post interviews working to show the development of students' mathematical thinking skills through the staging of an appropriately scaffolded intervention and measuring its success. The success of this programme was confirmed by school staff.

"They [the students] definitely made growth. My intervention was based on place value because their place-value knowledge was quite low compared to their classmates. So, we built on that, and they made growth on their actual interview, which is good." – Teacher

5.3.5. Leadership, Quality Teaching, & Workforce Development

The importance of active and engaged leaders to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success was foregrounded across the sample schools.

The schools which embedded a broad, whole-school orientation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait student success were underpinned by an expansive understanding of leadership and shared responsibility, where fostering student success was achieved through supporting the agency of a variety of stakeholders.

Aboriginal Key Teachers (AKTs) provided teachers with resources for learning, helped them to build connections with the wider community and provided them with confidence and encouragement to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or curriculum.

Some informants commented that a strength of the SSG was that the application process was school driven. This allowed schools to direct how a successful grant would be spent, enabling schools to tailor the grant to specific needs and gaps.

"That was a massive great enabler. And it allowed us to drive a project that we were passionate about. Sometimes they [CET] drive the projects that has [sic] come from within, come from them. And we think, "Oh, gee." But this allowed us to drive a project from within ourselves. That was a great enabler." – School leader

In some schools, the SSGs provided an impetus to positively discriminate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by providing extra learning support.

In the sample, there was evidence of schools connecting quality teaching for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to rigorous planning, assessment, evaluation practices.

Professional learning that provided staff and teachers with knowledge of the true histories of Tasmania was seen as critical by several interviewees because many staff and teachers had, in fact, been educated in erroneous histories in their own schooling experiences.

“I popped in near the end for half an hour, and the teacher assistants were crying. It was that – [the Black Box experience] had such an impact. And many of them had been educated here in the schools where they had learnt the wrong history ...And felt guilty, felt ignorant, felt cheated that they didn’t know all this. So that was powerful – really powerful.”
– School leader

The importance of professional learning and ongoing staff development was highlighted by interviewees across the sample schools.

5.3.6. Pathways and Transitions

One school focused their SSG explicitly on transitions by funding a staff role designed to make stronger connections with external stakeholders. This school was unable to show whether the new role had been effective in achieving its aims because the metrics designed to capture success were longitudinal measures.

In the detailed case study schools, there were no SSGs explicitly tied to school readiness for primary age students.

5.4. Benefits of the Student Success Grants

There were three noteworthy benefits of the SSGs: 1) enhanced staff awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, histories, and cultures 2) improved student outcomes as a result of an enhanced sense of cultural identity and well-being and 3) cultural sensitivity and community connections.

5.4.1. Enhanced Staff Awareness and Understanding

There is some evidence of enhanced staff awareness and understanding which filtered into schools embedding understandings of culture and history in the classroom as well as providing more nuanced responses to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, some of these changes enabled by the SSG require slow, attitudinal changes. Across all schools, the **Aboriginal Key Teachers were crucial to supporting enhanced staff awareness and understanding.** Across the sample, AKTs offered both formal and incidental professional learning opportunities for staff and were pragmatic enablers for the Indigenisation of the curriculum.

5.4.2. Student Outcomes

The SSGs enabled schools to provide additional support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This support was identified in both literacy and numeracy programmes, as well as initiatives that supported cultural connectedness and well-being.

Many informants recognised that successful outcomes are academic, socio-emotional and tied to students' sense of identity and cultural belonging. Notably, additional support contributed to **improvements in confidence and self-esteem for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal students.**

5.4.3. Cultural Sensitivity and Community Connections

Several schools indicated that the SSGs helped foster a more culturally connected community by providing the necessary support **to make respect for Country, culture, and languages more visible at school.**

Several schools were committed to ensuring students felt proud to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Community connections were strong at schools with embedded whole-school approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

5.5. Enablers of Success

- **Key staff member:** The Aboriginal Key Teacher (AKT) role is central to driving positive change at the school level, both providing impetus for action and guidance to staff. In schools with strong embedded cultures of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the AKT had sufficient time to cultivate relationships with staff and community members and Elders, and they were often directly involved with leadership and strategic planning.
- **School leadership:** Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success was reflected in the philosophical visions and strategic planning enacted by school leaders. The distribution of leadership was a key component of schools enacting a whole-school approach to cultivating student success.
- **Professional learning:** Schools that were deeply engaged in building cultural responsiveness had regular professional learning opportunities. A dominant theme across the data was the trepidation of staff, who often felt a strong fear of making mistakes or creating offence.
- **Connection with community:** Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal students benefited from incursions and excursions that engaged with local community connections and Elders. Connections often took time to establish and some schools had more difficulty building these connections depending on their local context.

5.6. Barriers to Success

- **A lack of cross-cultural confidence:** Staff are concerned about getting content right and doing justice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Many staff perceived the local Aboriginal community context as complex and political.
- **Professional learning and staff development:** Staff lacked the resources and confidence to engage with content specific to Tasmanian Aboriginal histories and cultures.
- **Negative attitudes:** Schools suggested they were caught between supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and catering to the broader school community which may not always be amenable to reconciliation.
- **Few connections with community:** While connections with community are also framed as a strength, in schools where these connections were weaker, a lack of connection posed a barrier to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

5.7. Lessons Learnt

- **The importance of the application process:** some schools gained a greater understanding of the needs of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the application process. CET could ensure that schools are not diluting SSG resourcing to meet other school priorities.
- **Time frames:** Informants shared that it was difficult to enact positive change in their schools within the SSG funding time frame.
- **Genuine commitment with the community:** Implementation of the SSG had to be genuine and support deep, long-term change. Interviewees cautioned against tokenistic additions and to ensure Aboriginal cultures and histories were embedded into school practices and strategies.

5.8. Complexity

- **Mixed results:** The SSGs produced mixed results in relation to their short-term targets, however, this should not detract from the long-term framing of the student success strategy.
- **Disconnect between policy and local practice:** Some SSG grant applications were framed to address learning performance, when in practice, many teachers and schools suggested their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were defying the national data trend.
- **Diluted SSG benefits:** Within some SSG applications, schools targeted improvement in learning outcomes for Aboriginal students by providing support staff and teachers with training in particular instructional strategies. In some of these cases, the SSG funding use was not targeted to First Nations Australian students.

Findings from the Leadership Workshops

In August 2021 Catholic Education Tasmania brought together its school leaders for two days. The research team was allocated 90 minutes to run a workshop during this time, with two main purposes: to enable knowledge and insights to be shared between leaders for their own professional learning; and to provide further data for the research.

The topics for the four experiences in the workshop were chosen because they were highlighted as areas of interest based on initial analysis of the survey and case studies. The four experiences were:

- (i) AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4
- (ii) Innovative ways of connecting to community
- (iii) Outcomes from the Quantitative Data: Survey
- (iv) Using activity theory to investigate successful education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Two researchers led each experience. The cohort of about 50 leaders was split into four groups. The researcher pairs facilitated their activity with each group for about 18 minutes, before moving on to the next group. This enabled each group of leaders to participate in all four experiences.

In this report, findings from experience iii) have been covered in the section titled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Performance and experience iv) proved to be a productive learning activity for the leaders, rather than providing data for this report. In this section, we document the outcomes from experience i) and experience ii).

6.1. Experience 1: AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4

In this experience, the school leaders focused on AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4.⁷ They were invited to respond to three questions:

1. What relationship do you see between 1.4 and 2.4 in your role as a school leader?
2. Would you like to share any stories of success you have had in leading 1.4 because of 2.4?
3. How could CET better support you in this work?

Leaders were positive about current support from CET to schools. There was a strong feeling amongst school leaders of the importance of working towards Reconciliation and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Leaders identified two main areas of support that could come from CET: professional learning and resourcing.

The leaders affirmed the importance of investing in people so that assistant teachers, teachers, and leaders have professional learning experiences that generate a sense of belonging to the agendas outlined in the school action plans and inherent in AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4. The leaders reported that there was a wide variance in knowledge across staff members.

There was a strong call for the provision of more professional learning. The leaders identified the importance of content knowledge before pedagogical knowledge. During the session, we heard excellent experiences of leadership working with Aboriginal Student Support Teachers, who delivered learning about culture and identity and how they facilitated culturally responsive spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. While many leaders gave these accounts of practice involving Aboriginal community members, there appear to be limited opportunities for workforce development for the community members.

⁷AITSL Standard 1.4: *Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students - Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.*

AITSL Standard 2.4: *Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians - Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014)*

Knowledge about what resources were already available in Tasmania varied between leaders. A representative quote from a leader about resourcing was, 'Curriculum development and resources which enable staff to feel comfortable and confident to teach'. Schools within Catholic Education Tasmania can learn from each other, by sharing knowledge about resources and their own success stories. It would be useful for CET to **develop a resource where programs of professional learning and resources are mapped**, and where each school can showcase their success.

6.2. Experience 2: Innovative Ways of Connecting to Community

To further the understanding of how Tasmanian Catholic schools connect with their Aboriginal community, one element of the interactive workshop was focused on capturing the participant's knowledge and insights into their lived experiences and local knowledge of community.

The groups were given the following questions as stimuli for this discussion:

4. Who are the key groups in the Aboriginal community for your school?
5. What activities do you undertake in your school that work well for connecting with your Aboriginal community?
6. Who in the community does that work well for?
7. What other ways of connection might be useful for other parts of the community?

The responses from the leaders highlighted that the approach to community connection is dynamic, not one-way.

6.2.1. Community Connection by and for the School

In terms of identifying the key groups in the Aboriginal community for their school, leaders interpreted this not only as groups they provide connection for ('recipients' of connection by the school) but also groups who came to the school to help create connections ('contributors' of connection for the school). This is illustrated in Figure 10 below.

Key points are:

- Some groups were talked about in both ways, especially elders and community members.
- The groups in bold font were mentioned by particularly large numbers of leaders.
- Among the contributors, the first six are Tasmanian Aboriginal groups. The remaining groups are likely to include a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

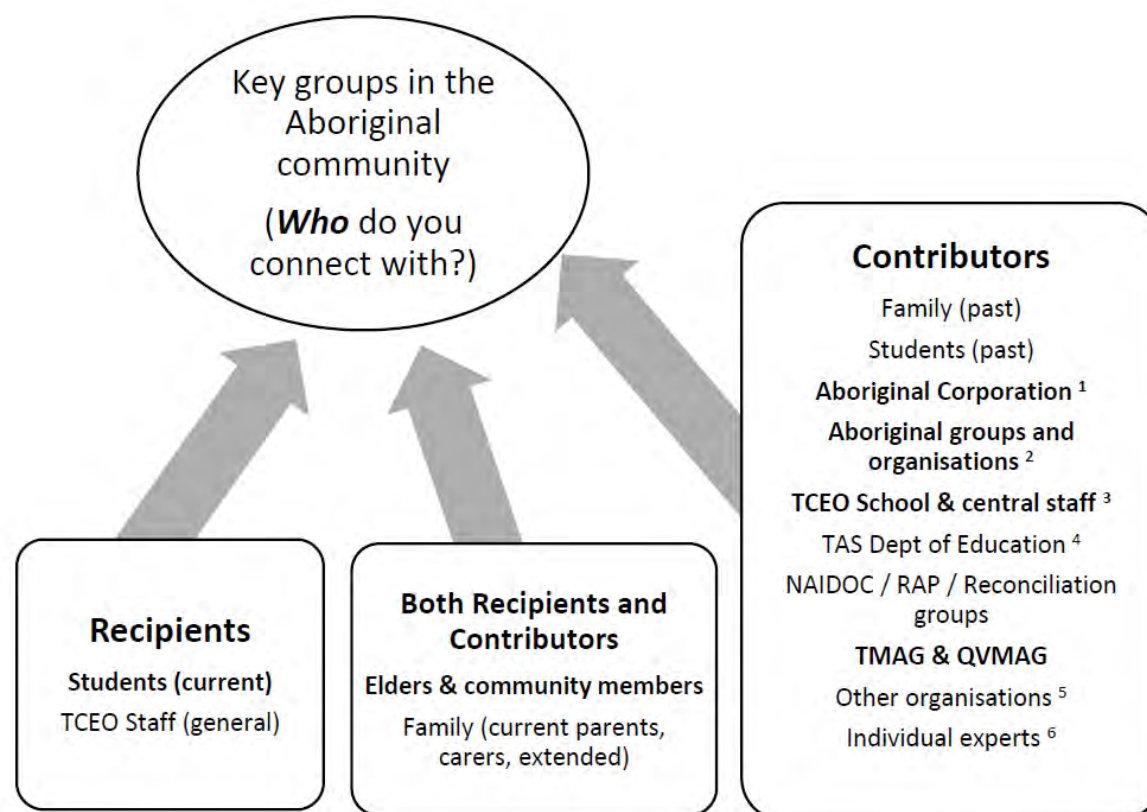


Figure 10: Who Schools Connect within the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community

¹CHAC, SETAC, TAC

² E.g., NITA, UTAS Riawunna

³ Aboriginal support, EAL support, other schools

⁴ Aboriginal Education Services, Child and Family Centres, The Orb

⁵ E.g., sustainability centre; Tasmanian Association for the Gifted

⁶ Artists, historians

6.2.2. Activities by the School and by Community

In terms of what work was done with these groups, there were activities provided by the school as well as activities provided by community organisations. This is illustrated in Figure 10.

Key points are:

- Some activities were collaborative, involving both the school and community as 'providers'.
- The activities in bold font were mentioned by particularly large numbers of leaders.

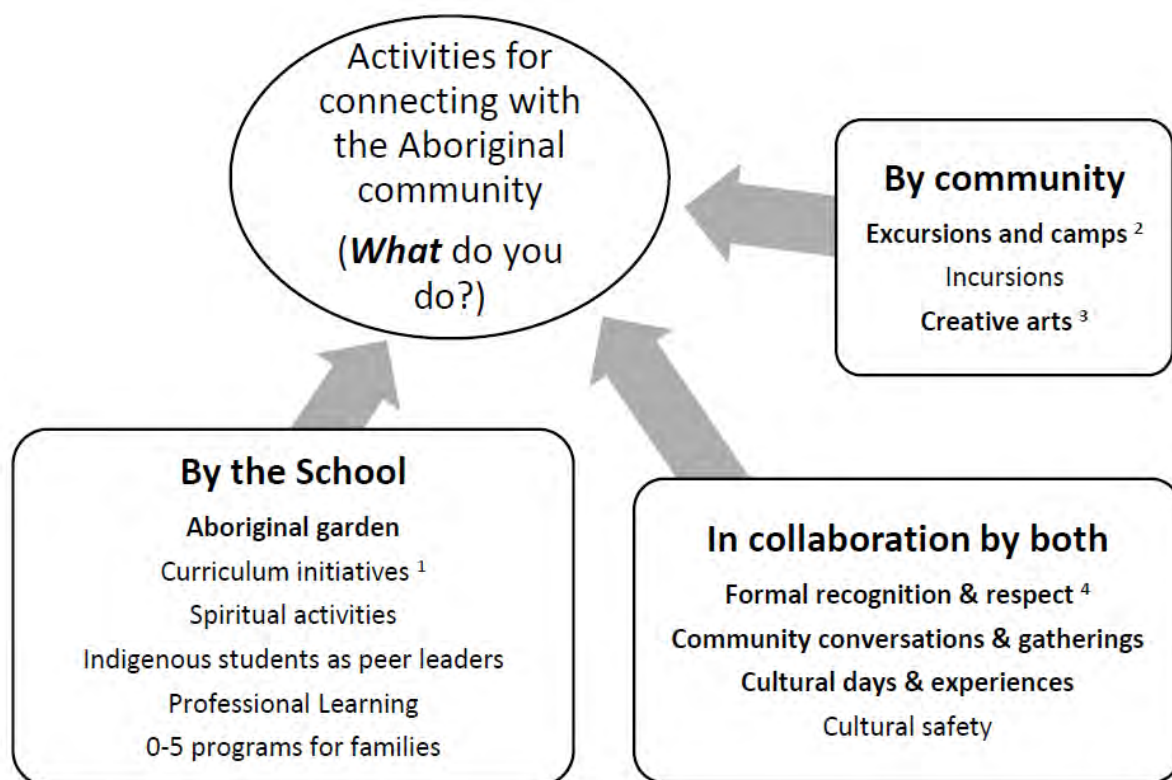


Figure 11: Connection Activities by Schools and Community

¹ E.g., literacy, palawi kani, pathway planning

^{2 & 3} Often largely provided by the community, although also supported by school staff

⁴ E.g., Acknowledgement of Country, RAP development, NAIDOC week events

6.2.3. Two-way, Highly Distributed, and Intergenerational Connections

Two-way collaborations: The two-way collaborations point to strong connections between schools and various Aboriginal people and organisations in their communities. At times building connections with the Aboriginal community was outsourced to external people and organisations who were seen to have the necessary expertise and trust, because school staff felt anxiety about taking this on.

Wide range of organisations: The variety of organisations named (see Figure 10) highlights the range of organisations with a broad remit to promote and lead reconciliation, cultural and identity training and awareness, education, and sustainability agendas for building respect and trust between the wider Australian Community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Intergenerational connections: Elders and extended families were often named as both recipients and contributors, highlighting the intergenerational nature of the connections in and for schools.

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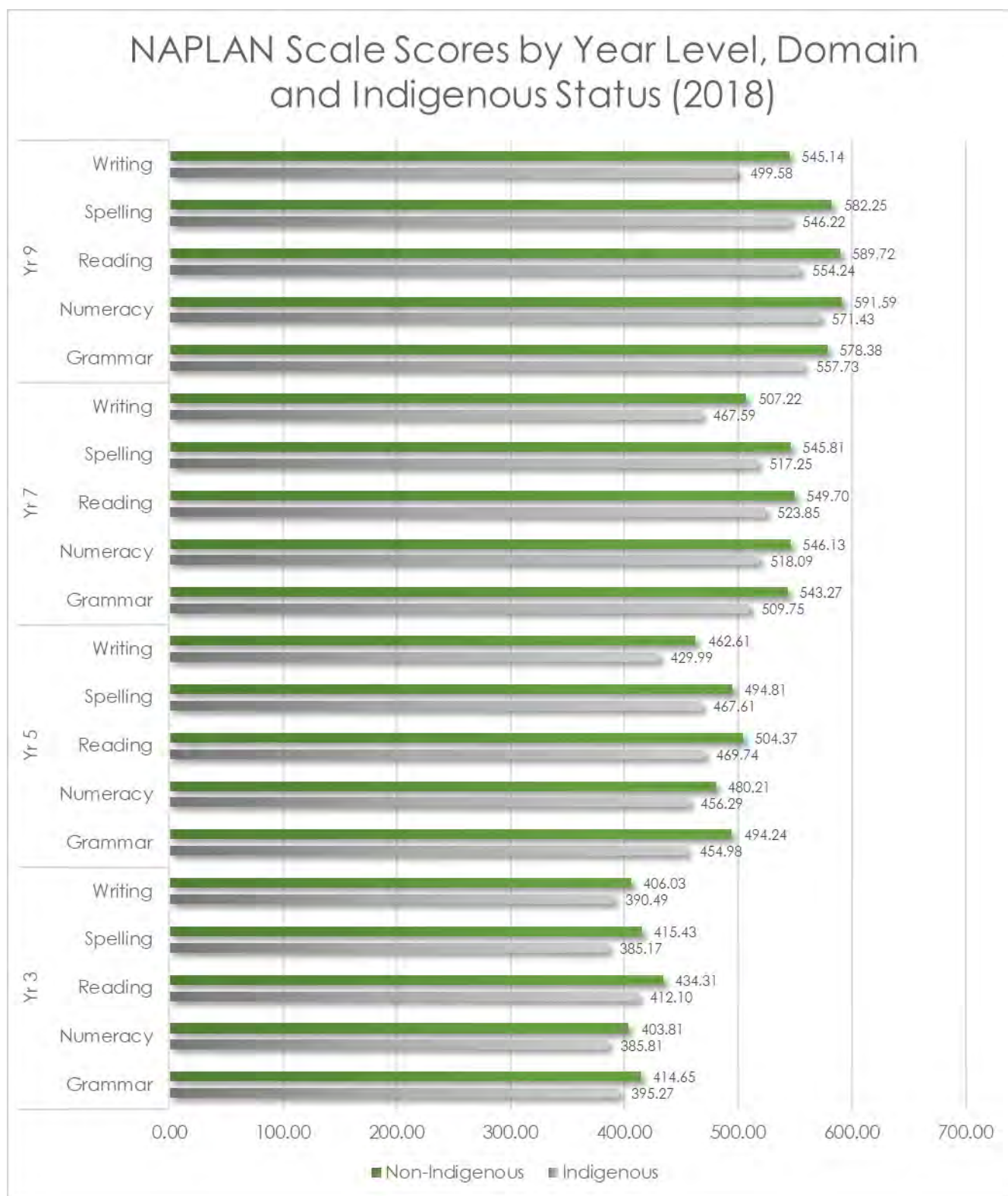
Appendices

Appendix A - Comparative NAPLAN Scale Scores

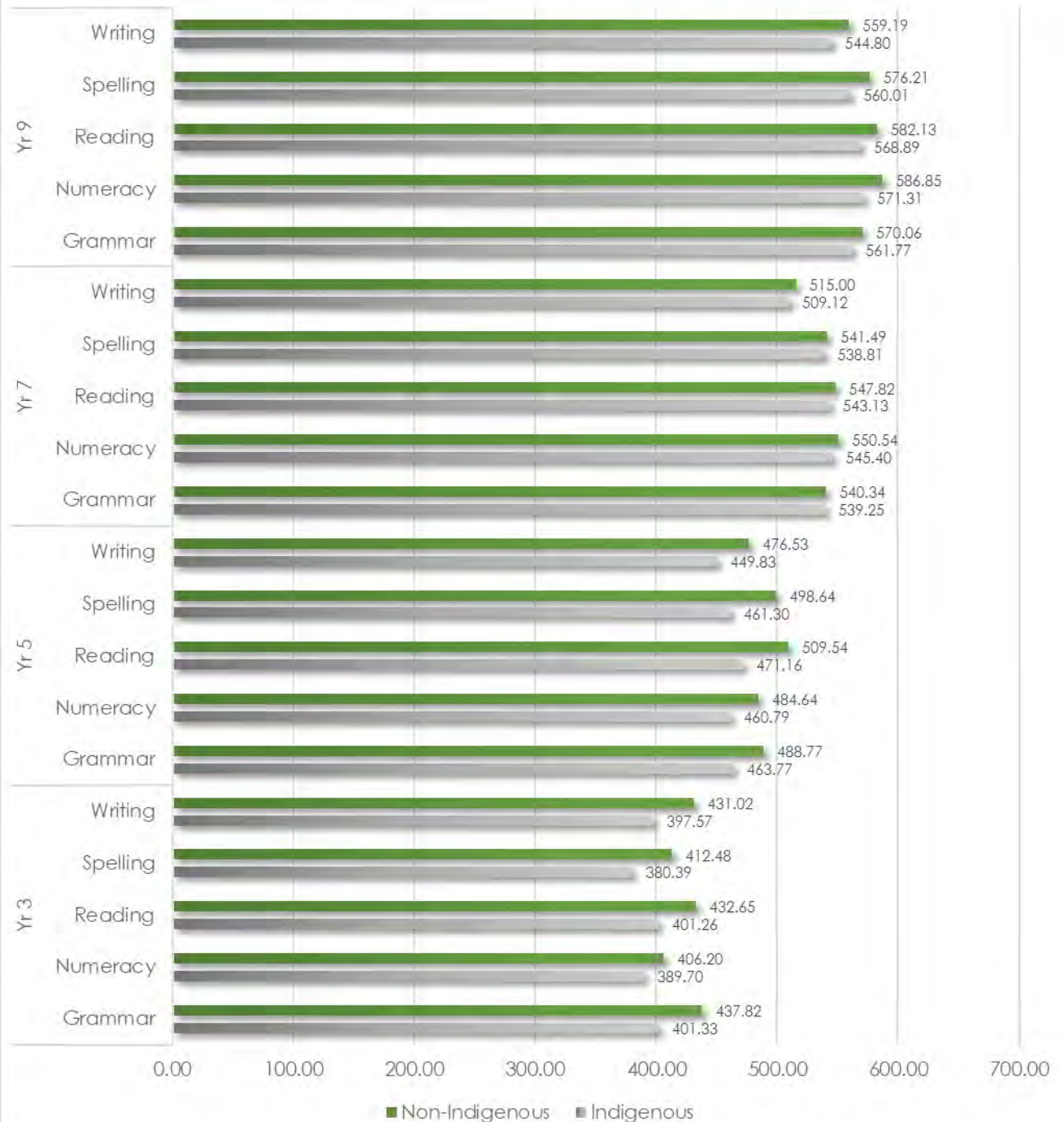
Appendix B - Overview of EFA and the construction of “Curriculum and Pedagogy” and “Cultural Responsiveness”

Appendix C - Networks of Partnerships

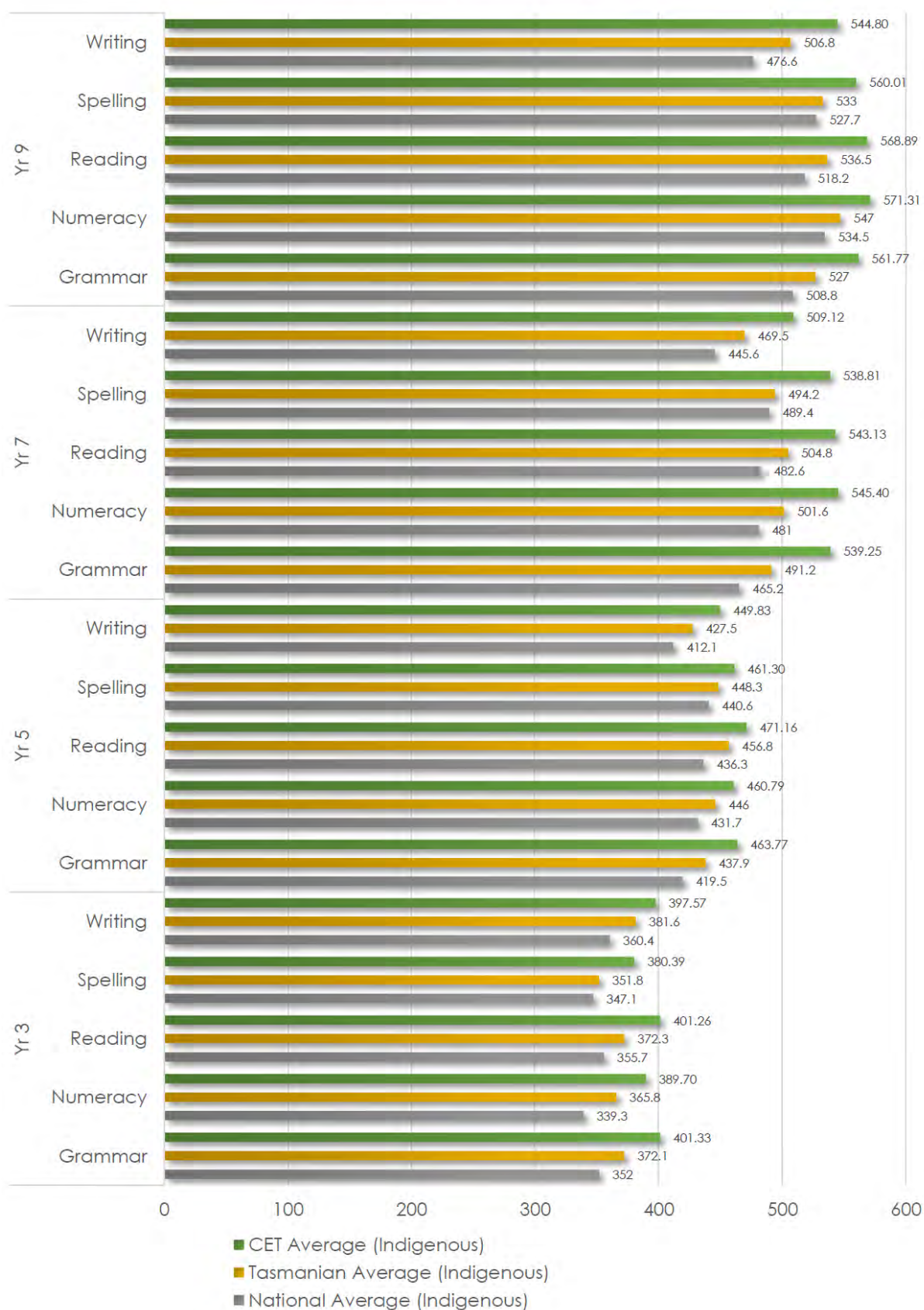
Appendix A - Comparative NAPLAN Scale Scores



NAPLAN Scale Scores by Year Level, Domain and Indigenous Status (2019)



2019 NAPLAN Scale Scores by Year Level and Domain
(CET Indigenous Average, Tasmanian Indigenous Average and
National Indigenous Average)



Appendix B – Overview of EFA and the construction of “Curriculum and Pedagogy” and “Cultural Responsiveness”

EFA is a statistical method that can be employed to uncover underlying structures that exist within a given data set. It is premised on the theory that whilst there are phenomena that cannot be directly observed in an empirical manner, they can be indirectly observed via the influence they create. For example, we cannot empirically observe a state of being such as happiness, but we can empirically observe the signs and signals that an individual may demonstrate when they are happy (e.g., smiling, energetic, open body language, relaxation of posture, etc). EFA is particularly useful in the context of this analysis for two reasons, it enabled us to explore the underlying structure of the ten supports and thus reduce the number of observed variables within the analysis.

As we have described in the text, EFA identified a two-dimensional structure operating within the data pertaining to the ten supports. This was based on the recommendations put forward by Kaiser (1960) and the analysis of scree plots, which revealed two distinct factors. In combination, these factors were able to explain 88% of the variance in the data. Rotation of these factors⁸ identified a clear factor two factor structure with only one problematic cross-loading⁹. This factor structure is displayed below in Table 4.

Variables (The Ten Supports)	Factor Loadings	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Working for Community Engagement & Sovereignty	.93	.16
Connectedness	.78	.29
Cultural Sensitivity & Well-being	.89	.27
Respect for Country, Culture and Languages	.93	.24
Leading Whole-school Initiatives	.36	.76
Curriculum	.32	.77
Purposeful Understandings of Literacy	.21	.94
Purposeful Understandings of Numeracy	.27	.92
Pedagogic Practices	.34	.85
Teacher Agency	.54	.71

Table 4: Rotated Solution for Exploratory Factor Analysis

⁸ Oblique Promax rotation was employed as the factors were likely to be correlated.

⁹ Cross-loading refers to the phenomena where a given variable loads highly onto more than one factor.

As can be seen in Table 4, Factor 1 was defined by variables related to recognition and responsiveness to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (e.g., Respect for Country, Culture and Languages) whereas Factor 2 was defined by variables related to curriculum, pedagogy and practice (e.g., Purposeful Understandings of Numeracy).

These results suggest that there are two broad schools of thought in regard to what best supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success – approaches that place emphasis on culturally responsive practice and approaches that place emphasis on curriculum and pedagogy however whilst a clear distinction exists it is important to note that these schools of thought are not mutually exclusive within the schools themselves – both are apparent within all the schools that completed the survey, rather what the data is telling us is that a school may tend to focus on one more than the other.

Based on the clarity of the factor structure, it was deemed appropriate to combine the foci (with the exception of Teacher Agency) into two distinct variables for the remainder of the analysis: Cultural Responsiveness (Factor 1) and Curriculum & Pedagogy (Factor 2).

Appendix C - Networks of partnerships

Some networks of partnerships emerged from the SSG applications and CET annual plans and budgets. Organisations that were important to these networks are listed below:

- **Karadi Aboriginal Corporation**
- **Wayraparrattee**
- **Ptunarra Child and Family Centre**
- **WarWyn Early Learning Centre**
- **South East Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation (SETAC)**
- **Weetapoona**
- **Seed Mob**
- **NITA Education**
- **Tagari**
- **TMAG**
- **QVMAG**
- **Tiagarra**
- **Riawunna**
- **Reconciliation Tasmania**

In addition, 20 different elders and community members were mentioned as important connections by the schools.



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