

# 2025 English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) learners fact sheet

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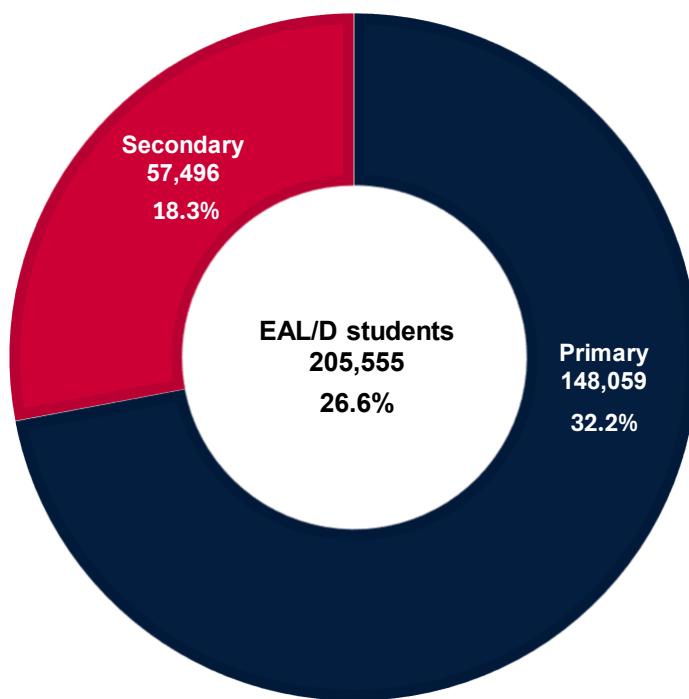
# Who are English as an additional language or dialect learners?

This fact sheet provides a high-level overview of findings from the 2025 English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) data collection, administered to NSW public schools at the beginning of June each year. EAL/D learners are acquiring English as a second or additional language or dialect as well as developing literacy skills in English. They are a subset of the broader population of students who come from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). LBOTE reflects language background (for example, Arabic, Hindi), while EAL/D phases identify English language proficiencies.

In 2025, 40.0% of all NSW public school students were from a language background other than English. About 65.4%\* of these students were learning English as an additional language or dialect, representing 26.6% of the total NSW public school student population. As shown in Figure 1, there were 205,555 EAL/D students attending a NSW public school in 2025.

EAL/D learners are assessed by their teachers as having English language proficiency in one of 4 phases: (1) Beginning; (2) Emerging; (3) Developing; or (4) Consolidating. Please refer to [EAL/D Learning Progressions](#) for information about the ACARA and department developed EAL/D Learning Progressions. In 2025, 9.7% of EAL/D learners were assessed in the Beginning phase, 23.0% were in the Emerging phase, 34.3% were in the Developing phase and 32.9% were in the Consolidating phase.

Figure 1: 2025 Primary, Secondary and total EAL/D learners



\* The percentage of LBOTE students who are EAL/D learners is an estimate only, as these data collections are conducted separately and at different times of the year. LBOTE is conducted annually in March, while EAL/D is conducted annually in June. As a result, not all EAL/D learners may be captured in the LBOTE collection.

## Have there been any changes to the EAL/D population over time?

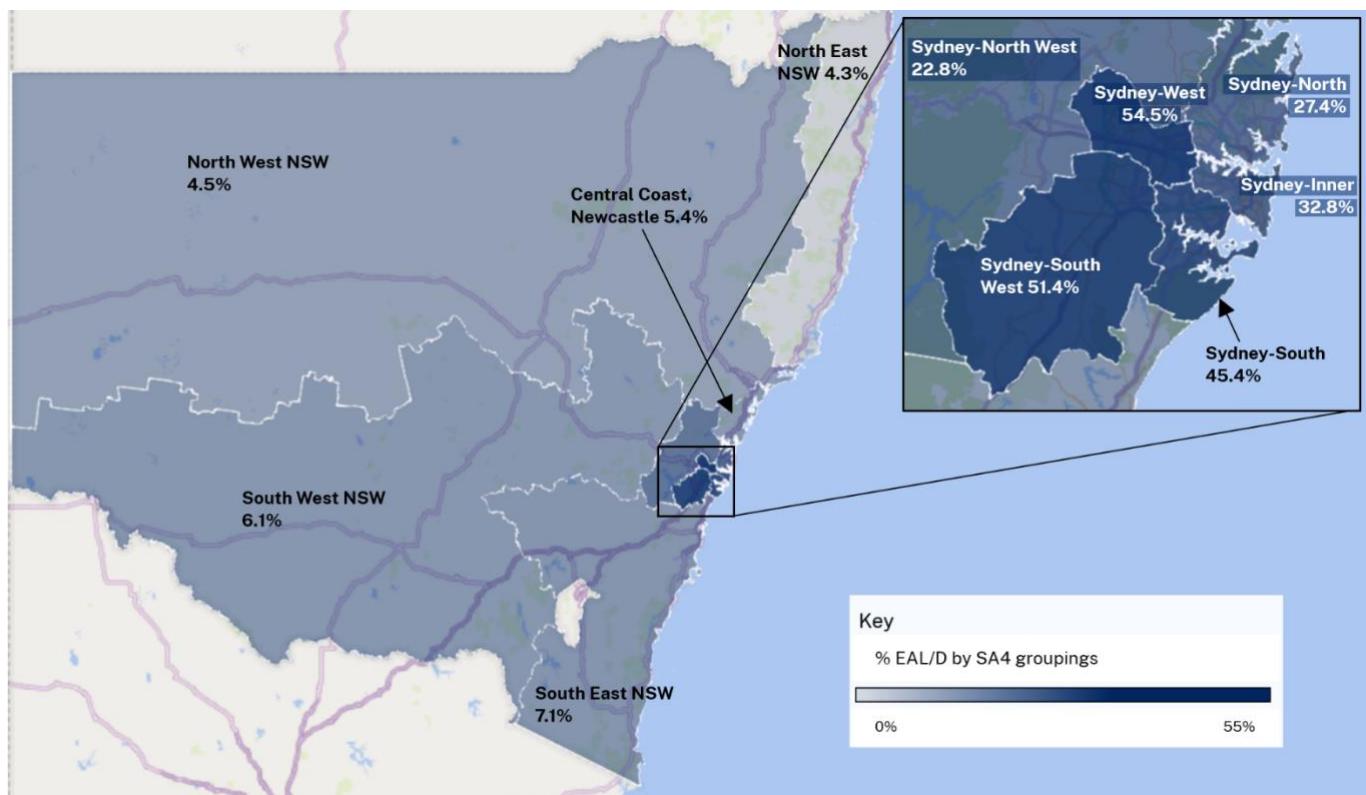
The map in Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of EAL/D learners across NSW public schools using a geographical structure based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. The ASGS is maintained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and is widely used as it enables comparison of statistical data.

ASGS Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) boundaries in NSW have been combined by the NSW Department of Education into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data. In 2025, the highest proportion of EAL/D learners was in Sydney-West (54.5%). This was a 0.1 percentage points increase from 54.4% in 2024, but it was consistent with the rate in 2021. North East NSW had the lowest proportion of EAL/D learners, at 4.3%. However, this was a 0.5 percentage points increase from 2024, and a 1.9 percentage points increase from 2021.

As shown in Figure 3, Enrolments of EAL/D learners increased by 1,793 (0.9%) from 203,762 students in 2024 to 205,555 students in 2025. Between 2021 and 2025, enrolments of EAL/D learners increased by 8,073 (4.1%) from 197,482 students in 2021. EAL/D enrolments as a proportion of the total student population were 26.6% in 2025. This was a 0.5 percentage points increase from 26.1% in 2024 and a 2.0 percentage points increase from 24.6% in 2021.

Please note, the number of EAL/D students may have been affected between 2021 and 2022 due to COVID-19, resulting in lower international arrivals.

Figure 2: EAL/D learners as a proportion of student population in SA4 groupings, 2025



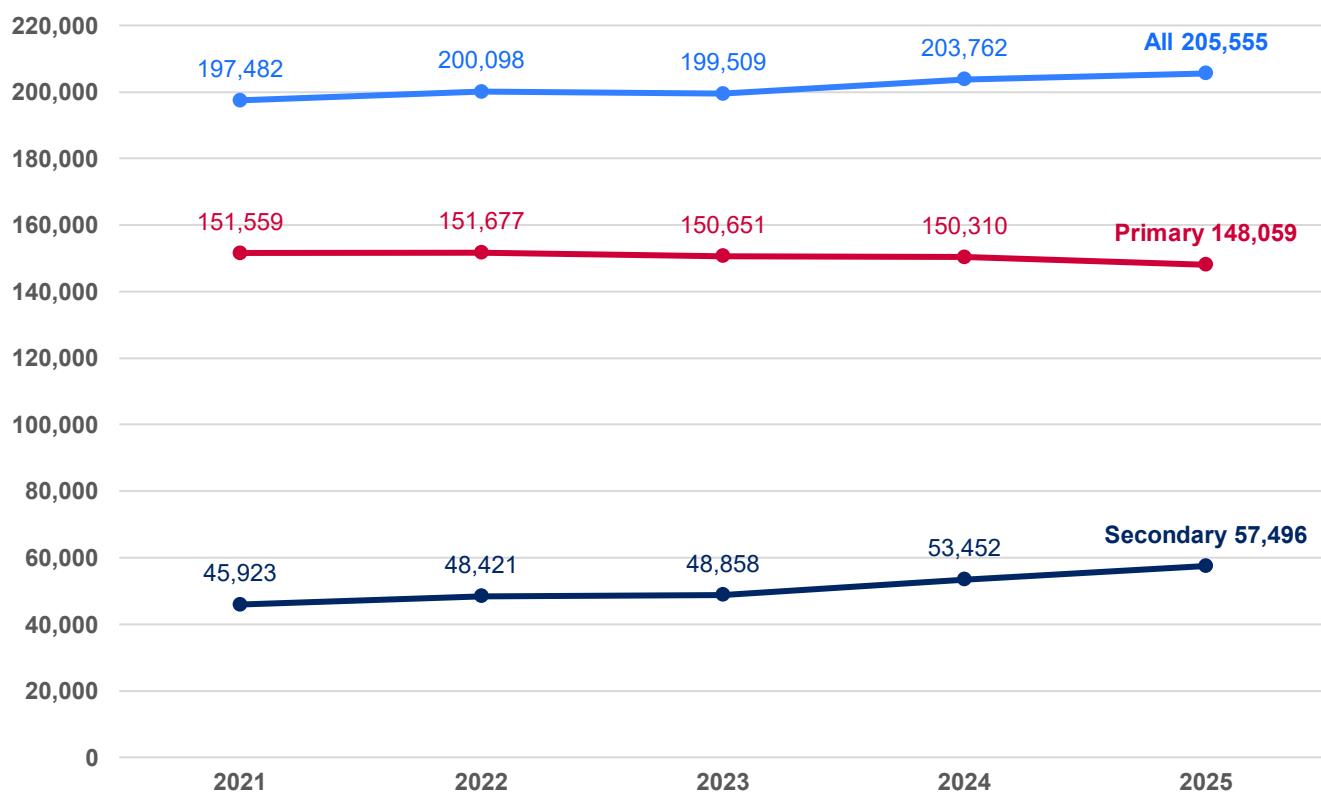
## Primary and Secondary EAL/D learners

In 2025:

- 148,059 EAL/D learners were primary students, dropping by 2,251 (1.5%) from 2024, and by 3,500 (2.3%) from 2021.
- 57,496 EAL/D learners were secondary students, increasing by 4,044 (7.6%) from 2024 and by 11,573 (25.2%) from 2021.

Almost three-quarters of EAL/D learners were primary students (72.0%) and over a quarter were secondary students (28.0%). The proportion of primary students has been decreasing in the last 5 years from 76.7% in 2021 (with secondary students being 23.3% in that year). It is likely that students progress out of requiring support by secondary school, which may affect these proportions. It is also worth noting that the overall NSW public secondary student cohort size is only about two-thirds that of the primary cohort size.

Figure 3: EAL/D learners in NSW public schools by educational level, 2021 to 2025



## Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners

In 2025, 78,393 students in NSW public schools identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing 10.1% of the total student population. Of these, 2,628 students were EAL/D learners. The proportion of Aboriginal students who were assessed as EAL/D learners (3.4%) has increased by 0.8 percentage points from 2.6% (2,000 students) in 2024 and by 1.1 percentage points from 2.3% (1,606 students) in 2021. This means a greater proportion of Aboriginal students are now assessed as learning English as an additional language or dialect compared to 4 years earlier.

## Students with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language backgrounds

In 2025, there were 2,927 students with a language background of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander languages, a 29.3% increase from 2,263 students in 2024. Of those students, 50.7% (1,484 students) were identified as EAL/D learners in 2025, increasing by 10.0 percentage points from 40.7% in 2024. There were 2,174 students with specifically an Aboriginal English language background in 2025, a 43.8% increase from 1,512 students in 2024. Of those students, 59.5% (1,294 students) were identified as EAL/D learners in 2025, increasing by 11.4 percentage points from 48.1% in 2024.

In recent years, the Department of Education has worked closely with many NSW public schools to improve the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language backgrounds and support the collection of more accurate LBOTE census data. As a result, increases in students with these language backgrounds who were assessed as EAL/D learners may be attributable to improved data recording, leading to more students being assessed for their EAL/D learning needs, rather than actual student population growth.

## Refugee EAL/D learners

There were 11,236 EAL/D learners from refugee backgrounds in NSW public schools in 2025. This was a 5.6% increase from 10,640 in 2024, and a 10.0% increase from 10,212 in 2021.

5.5% of all EAL/D learners were from refugee backgrounds in 2025. This was slightly higher than 5.2% in both 2024 and 2021, indicating an increase of 0.3 percentage points. Unlike the total EAL/D population, the proportion of EAL/D learners from a refugee background was higher for secondary students (54.9%) than for primary students (45.1%) in 2025.

## International student EAL/D learners

There were 2,600 international student EAL/D learners in NSW public schools in 2025. This was a 7.3% increase from 2,423 in 2024 and a 52.7% increase from 1,703 in 2021.

1.3% of all EAL/D learners were international students in 2025. This was a 0.1 percentage points increase from 1.2% in 2024 and a 0.4 percentage points increase from 0.9% in 2021.

The majority of international student EAL/D learners were secondary students (81.0%) in 2025, with 19.0% being primary students. However, the proportion of primary international student EAL/D learners has been increasing over the past 5 years, up 0.8 percentage points from 18.2% in 2024 and 11.5 percentage points from 7.5% in 2021.

## What were EAL/D learners' phases of English language proficiency?

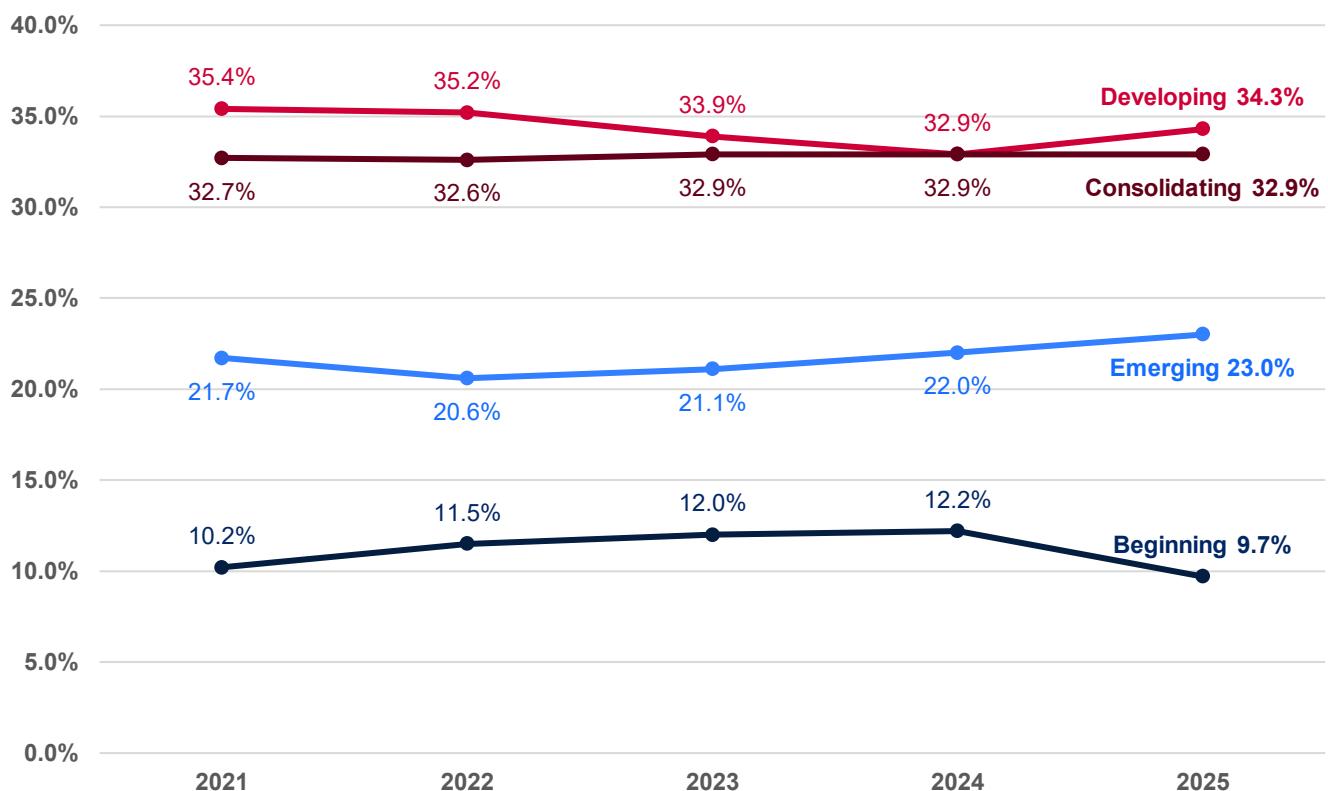
EAL/D students are assessed by their teachers as having English language proficiency in one of 4 phases: (1) Beginning; (2) Emerging; (3) Developing; or (4) Consolidating. Please refer to [EAL/D Learning Progressions](#) for information about the ACARA and department developed EAL/D Learning Progressions.

As presented in Figure 4, in 2025:

- 9.7% of EAL/D learners were assessed in the Beginning phase, down 2.5 percentage points from 12.2% in 2024 and down 0.5 percentage points from 10.2% in 2021. This was the first time since 2021 that the percentage of learners in this phase decreased.
- 23.0% were in the Emerging phase, up 1.0 percentage point from 22.0% in 2024 and up 1.3 percentage points from 21.7% in 2021.

- 34.3% were in the Developing phase, up 1.4 percentage points from 32.9% in 2024, but down 1.1 percentage points from 35.4% in 2021. This was the first time since 2021 that the percentage of learners in this phase increased.
- 32.9% were in the Consolidating phase, which was unchanged from 2024 and up 0.2 percentage points from 32.7% in 2021.

Figure 4: EAL/D students in each English language proficiency phase as a proportion of all EAL/D students in NSW public schools, 2021 to 2025



As presented in Figure 5, in 2025:

- The highest proportion (36.5%) of primary EAL/D learners were in the Developing phase. The Emerging and Consolidating phases had similar proportions of 27.4% and 25.1% respectively, while the smallest proportion of learners (11.0%) was in the Beginning phase.
- The majority (53.1%) of secondary EAL/D learners were in the Consolidating phase. 28.9% were in the Developing phase, with lower proportions in the Emerging and Beginning phases (11.7% and 6.3%) respectively. The higher percentage of students assessed in the Consolidating phase may reflect their increasing English language proficiency due to a longer time acquiring English skills.
- For more information on EAL/D learners and how long it typically takes to learn English, please refer to [EAL/D advice for schools](#).

Table 1 presents this data at a more granular level, by scholastic year to allow for more detailed comparisons of phases if desired.

Figure 5: NSW public school students' English language proficiency phases as a proportion of all EAL/D phases, by schooling level, 2025

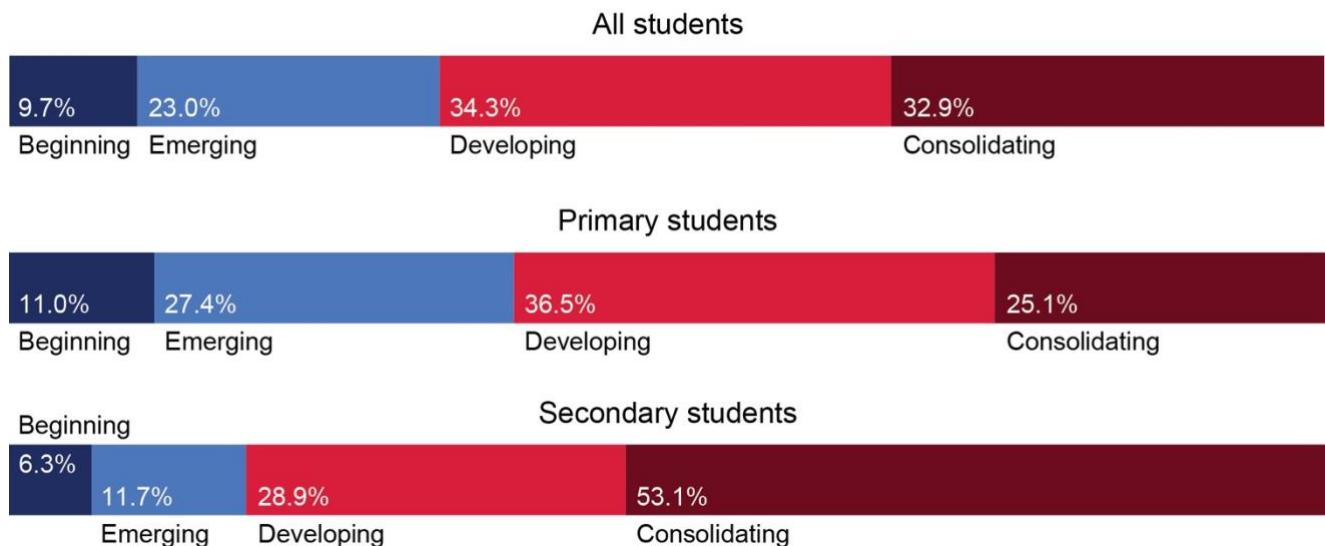


Table 1: NSW public school students' English language proficiency phases as a proportion of all EAL/D phases, by scholastic year, 2025

Scholastic year	EAL/D phase			
	Beginning	Emerging	Developing	Consolidating
Kindergarten	34.0%	42.8%	18.5%	4.7%
Year 1	18.2%	47.7%	26.5%	7.6%
Year 2	7.7%	35.6%	39.9%	16.8%
Year 3	5.6%	25.5%	47.1%	21.8%
Year 4	4.1%	17.0%	49.2%	29.7%
Year 5	3.5%	12.3%	43.1%	41.0%
Year 6	2.7%	8.7%	30.6%	57.9%
Year 7	5.5%	10.7%	29.1%	54.7%
Year 8	6.4%	11.7%	29.3%	52.5%
Year 9	7.0%	11.5%	28.0%	53.4%
Year 10	9.5%	14.5%	27.5%	48.6%
Year 11	5.6%	13.5%	29.8%	51.1%
Year 12	2.6%	7.2%	30.0%	60.3%

## Primary student progression between 2024 and 2025

EAL/D learners will typically progress through the 4 phases of English language proficiency during their English language learning development. According to EAL/D advice for schools, students in the Beginning phase are expecting the progress to the next phase in 6 to 9 months (less than 1 year), students in the Emerging phase are expected to progress in 1 to 2 years, students in the Developing phase are expected to progress in 2 to 5 years and students in the Consolidation phase are expected to progress in 5 to 7+ years.

As shown in Table 2:

- 47.9% of primary EAL/D learners in the Beginning phase in 2024 progressed to the Emerging phase in 2025.
- Most primary EAL/D learners in the Emerging phase remained in the same phase (43.2%) the following year. Though a significant proportion (41.1%) progressed to the Developing stage.
- Most primary EAL/D learners in the Developing and Consolidating phases remained in the same phase the following year (56.4% and 63.5% respectively).

Table 2: NSW public school primary students' phase progression between 2024 and 2025

		2025 EAL/D phase				
		Beginning	Emerging	Developing	Consolidating	Not required
2024 EAL/D Phase	Beginning	28.6%	47.9%	11.8%	1.7%	2.4%
	Emerging	0.9%	43.2%	41.1%	5.3%	3%
	Developing	0.1%	2.9%	56.4%	27.9%	5.3%
	Consolidating	0%	0.6%	5.6%	63.5%	16.9%

## Secondary student progression between 2024 and 2025

As shown in Table 3:

- Over a third (36.9%) of secondary EAL/D students in the Beginning phase in 2024 progressed to the Emerging phase in 2025, with a similar proportion (34.0%) remaining in the same phase.
- Most secondary EAL/D learners in the Emerging phase remained in the same phase (41.9%) the following year. However, a significant proportion (34.6%) progressed to the Developing stage.
- Most secondary students in the Developing and Consolidating phases remained in the same phase the following year (55.2% and 57.3% respectively).
- A larger proportion of secondary students were not captured the following year, which may be due to students' EAL/D phases being re-evaluated as not required, especially from the Developing and Consolidating phases (4.7% and 24.1% respectively).

Table 3: NSW public school secondary students' phase progression between 2024 and 2025

		2025 EAL/D phase				
		Beginning	Emerging	Developing	Consolidating	Not required
2024 EAL/D Phase	Beginning	34.0%	36.9%	9.6%	1.5%	0.8%
	Emerging	1.0%	41.9%	34.6%	3.9%	1.5%
	Developing	0%	2.7%	55.2%	20.6%	4.7%
	Consolidating	0%	0.3%	2.8%	57.3%	24.1%

## Explanatory notes

1. The census of EAL/D students was completed by all NSW public schools in June 2025, including Intensive English centres and distance education schools.
2. EAL/D learners are students whose home language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English who require additional support to assist them to develop English language proficiency.
3. Students are counted as having a language background other than English (LBOTE) if in their home, language other than English is spoken by the students, parents or guardians.
4. Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by many Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Aboriginal English differs from other dialects of English in linguistic structure (sentence formation and word meanings) and cultural usage.

Note: The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), through the addition of the 'D' in EAL/D, has intentionally included students who speak a variety of Aboriginal English as their first language, and who do not yet have full proficiency in Standard Australian English, as part of the cohort that requires targeted classroom support. The percentage of LBOTE students who are EAL/D learners is an estimate only, as these data collections are conducted separately and at different times of the year. LBOTE is conducted annually in March, while EAL/D is conducted annually in June. As a result, not all EAL/D learners may be captured in the LBOTE collection.

5. Students are included in the reporting as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander if they or their parents, families or carers identified them on the school enrolment form. Throughout this report, the term 'Aboriginal' is inclusive of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students may fall into multiple other equity groups including more remote geolocations.
6. For the purpose of this fact sheet, refugee students are those who have a current or a historical refugee status. It is not possible to provide a refugee student count as a proportion of all NSW public school students as refugee information is only part of the data collection for EAL/D students during the EAL/D census (based on Visa subclass information).
7. Phases of English language proficiency as described in ACARA's [EAL/D Learning Progression](#):

Phase	Description
Beginning English	These students are starting to learn English. They can speak one or more languages/dialects other than English and have an age-appropriate level of print literacy in their first language.
Emerging English	These students can speak one or more languages/dialects, including basic English, and have a growing knowledge of print literacy in English. They understand and participate in classroom behaviours and school routines.
Developing English	These students can speak one or more languages/dialects, including functional English, and have a developing knowledge of print literacy in English. They are active participants in classroom and school routines.
Consolidating English	These students can speak one or more languages/dialects and have a sound knowledge of English. They are active and increasingly independent participants in classroom and school routines.

8. Time taken to develop academic language in English with EAL/D support, as described in [EAL/D Advice for Schools](#):

Level of education in their first language	Time taken to develop academic English
Students with education in their first language	4 to 7 years
Students with disrupted education in their first language	Up to 10 years
Students with limited education in any language	7 to 12 years

9. For more information on EAL/D learners and how long it typically takes to learn English, please refer to [EAL/D advice for schools](#).

10. Student phase progression (Tables 2 and 3) tracks actual students from the base year to the progression year. This is done using students' Student Record Number (SRN). As actual students are tracked for this measure, the total of each progression will not equal 100% as students can move out of the NSW public schooling system.

11. Statistical Area Level 4 groupings – data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. ASGS Statistical Area 4 (SA4) have been combined into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

Name of SA4 groupings	SA4 name
Sydney-North	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby, Sydney - Northern Beaches, Sydney - Ryde
Sydney-Inner	Sydney - City and Inner South, Sydney - Eastern Suburbs, Sydney - Inner West
Sydney-South	Sydney - Inner South West, Sydney - Sutherland
Sydney-South West	Sydney - Outer South West, Sydney - South West
Sydney-West	Sydney - Blacktown, Sydney - Parramatta
Sydney-North West	Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury, Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains
North East NSW	Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Mid North Coast, Richmond - Tweed
North West NSW	Far West and Orana, Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle, New England and North West
South West NSW	Central West, Murray, Riverina
South East NSW	Capital Region, Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven
Central Coast, Newcastle	Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie