

What Works Best 2025

Illustration of practice

Explicit teaching at Doonside Technology High School

Explicit teaching is the foundation of classroom practice at Doonside Technology High School, a comprehensive co-educational school in western Sydney. In 2021, the school adopted a whole-school approach to explicit teaching with a clear goal to create a structured, predictable learning environment that would address learning gaps and engage students more deeply in learning. Explicit teaching is now embedded in every classroom, with students knowing from the outset what they are learning, how they will learn it and what success looks like. A strong professional culture of collaboration and mentoring supports teachers in embedding explicit teaching into their practice.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



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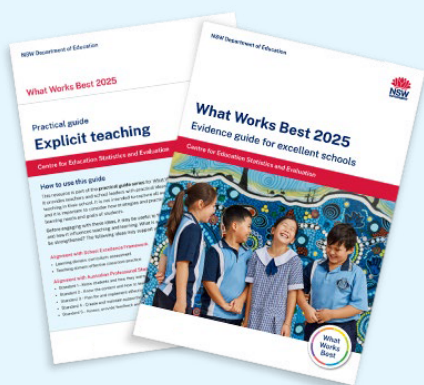
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How to use this resource

This resource is part of the illustrations of practice series for What Works Best 2025. It provides teachers and school leaders with descriptions of some of the key strategies used at Doonside Technology High School to implement explicit teaching. It is not intended to capture all aspects of explicit teaching at the school, and it is important for readers of this resource to consider how strategies and practices should be responsive to the learning needs and goals of students in their own school.

Teachers and school leaders can read, consider, discuss and implement strategies highlighted in this illustration of practice and its accompanying resources as part of school-developed High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL). The appropriate time to use this resource may differ for each school, leader and teacher.

Other What Works Best 2025 resources on explicit teaching



- What Works Best 2025 evidence guide for excellent schools – Chapter 2: Explicit teaching
- What Works Best 2025 practical guide – Explicit teaching



School details

- Doonside Technology High School is a comprehensive co-educational high school for Years 7 to 12 located on Dharug Country in western Sydney, approximately 23 km from Parramatta.
- The school has 726 students, including a support unit for approximately 70 students with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities.
- 16% of the student population identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 22% are from a Pasifika background and 10% are from a Filipino background.
- The school has a FOEI of 147,¹ and 52% of students are from a language background other than English.
- In 2024, Doonside Technology High School was recognised for demonstrating consistent growth in HSC results over 7 years and an increase in the number of students who achieved in the higher bands of the HSC, with positive progress for students across other achievement bands. The school's 2024 NAPLAN achievement for Year 7 and Year 9 students was above or close to students from similar backgrounds for all domains.
- The school engages different cohorts and populations of students through dedicated roles such as an Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO), a Filipino student support officer (SSO) and a Pacific Islander community liaison officer (PICLO).
- Staff regularly participate in professional learning on cultural inclusion, and every school program incorporates the 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning.²
- There are 60 full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff and 16 non-teaching staff, including administrative staff, school learning support officers (SLSOs) and AEOs employed in the school.
- Nearly a quarter of all teachers at the school are early-career teachers (within their first 5 years).³

1 Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) is a school-level index of educational disadvantage related to socioeconomic background. The average FOEI value is 100. A higher FOEI value indicates a higher level of disadvantage.

2 The 8 Ways framework is a NSW Department of Education initiative. Ownership of Indigenous Knowledge works belongs to individuals and groups. Permission should be sought from the original source out of courtesy. Refer to the [8 ways protocol](#) guidance.

3 In 2022, 14% of the national teacher workforce were early-career teachers (within their first 5 years). Source: AITSL (2023) [Spotlight: Australia's teacher workforce today](#).

Strategy 1: Embedding explicit teaching across classrooms

When Doonside Technology High School made explicit teaching its priority in 2021, it was to provide all students – regardless of their starting point – with a structured, well-scaffolded learning environment. Many students were entering high school below expected levels and teachers needed a cohesive approach to address these learning gaps.

Explicit teaching is now embedded across all classrooms, supported by schoolwide practices like collaborative planning and mentoring. At the centre of this approach is a pedagogical model, developed collaboratively by staff, which provides a framework for applying explicit teaching principles consistently across year levels and subject areas. This model sets out 4 distinct phases that align with explicit teaching principles of review and activation of prior learning, modelling, guided and independent practice, and checking for understanding:

- **Connect:** teachers connect learning to what students already know and share learning intentions and success criteria.
- **Enhance:** new concepts and skills are explicitly modelled and clearly explained.
- **Consolidate:** students engage in guided and independent practice, supported by effective questioning and timely feedback.
- **Evaluate:** teachers assess student understanding against success criteria and plan next steps for learning.⁴

Practice point: Breaking down new knowledge into small, manageable chunks

“Once we’ve built the goals of the lesson, then we go into what we call the ‘enhance phase’, which is our modelling phase. Concise language is really important, not overloading students with information all at once ... breaking things down into really concise steps, whether that be writing a paragraph or teaching somebody how to hit a ball.”

Alexandra Kelly
Classroom Teacher

School leaders promote this explicit teaching model not only as effective for students, but also as a practical tool that simplifies planning and improves lesson delivery. With a shared framework in place, teachers spend less time creating lessons from scratch, freeing up time for other priorities like collaborative planning, mentoring early-career teachers and using student data to refine instruction.

School leaders support long-term implementation by regularly communicating strategic priorities and codeveloping resources with staff to build a shared understanding of effective teaching practice. Staff input is actively sought through faculty meetings, professional learning communities (PLCs)⁵ and the School Excellence Plan (SEP) process. This collaborative approach fosters trust and ensures teachers have a meaningful voice in shaping how explicit teaching is implemented in practice.

⁴ The names of these phases represent the school’s language of explicit teaching within their context.

⁵ Professional learning communities are groups of educators that collaboratively improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Teachers and school leaders have collaboratively developed a suite of practical resources to support the implementation of explicit teaching. These include planning templates, exemplar strategies and reflective prompts that help bring the school's pedagogical vision to life. The resources are designed to reduce workload, promote consistency of practice and support ongoing professional reflection.

“By having those structures in place and planning as a whole school around that, it has allowed our staff to buy into it and work together and have those discussions across faculties to see, ‘How do you guys do this?’ or ‘What does it look like within your faculty?’”

Paul Karbon
Deputy Principal

Strategy 2: Building the capability of teachers

For explicit teaching to succeed, teachers need time to plan, access to resources, and opportunities for professional learning. At Doonside Technology High School, capability-building begins as soon as a new teacher joins the team. All early-career teachers take part in a comprehensive induction program that introduces the school's explicit teaching model and supports them to embed it in their classroom practice.

Across the school, staff are encouraged to engage in PLCs. These forums provide dedicated time for teachers to reflect on their practice, analyse student learning data and share strategies for strengthening explicit teaching. The work of each PLC aligns with the school's strategic priorities and supports ongoing professional growth.

A strong culture of trust enables teachers to learn from one another. Open-door practices and classroom observations provide regular opportunities for teachers to see explicit teaching in action and adapt strategies to their own practice. Practical tools further support implementation. For example, the school's Curriculum Feedback and Improvement Tool helps teachers evaluate the quality of their programs against a clear, consistent set of criteria. The tool prompts reflection on whether key elements – such as explicit modelling, guided practice and planned checks for understanding – are embedded in lesson design.

“We run professional learning communities. And this year, they're all around different parts of explicit teaching. There's one on formative assessment and feedback. There's another one on using data in the classroom. There's one on gradual release of responsibility. So, there's different PLCs running, by different teachers in the school who just nominate themselves that they'd like to be part of this and lead a team.”

Paul Karbon
Deputy Principal

Strategy 3: Using data to inform teaching and assessment

Staff at Doonside Technology High School place a strong emphasis on knowing their students well. Teachers are supported to develop a deep understanding of each student's strengths and learning needs from the moment they arrive at the school.

Class profiles play a central role in this process. These detailed documents draw on a wide range of data, including NAPLAN and Check-in assessments, personalised learning pathways (PLPs) and information from feeder primary schools.⁶ Each profile outlines students' academic strengths and areas for growth, literacy and language levels, wellbeing considerations and suggested strategies. Teachers use this information to differentiate instruction and plan formative assessment. To reduce the administrative burden on staff, the school's learning support team assists teachers in building and maintaining these profiles.

“ We've got class profiles. And that's as soon as they arrive in Year 7. So, we have that collaborative approach with our feeder primary schools and getting to know the students there and just talk about our students, what works best for them, it just goes such a long way to those success stories we have in the classroom.”

Nathan Brown
Head Teacher

“ I think the good thing about our school is we do class profiles. So, at the beginning of the year, we know what kids are like in the classroom. We've got experience from the other teachers who have taught them. And I think the best thing that our school does is that we try to discover these things really early.”

Anya Govender
Classroom Teacher



⁶ Class profiles also identify key learner groups, including high potential and gifted students, students learning English as an additional language or dialect, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and students with additional or complex needs.

Strategy 4: Embedding assessment across every teaching phase

Assessment is embedded across every phase of explicit teaching, from modelling to guided and independent practice. This allows teachers to monitor progress in real time, address misconceptions early and keep all students on track. To support consistency, teachers draw from a shared bank of strategies tailored to different stages of instruction.⁷ The school also provides teachers with clear programming guidelines for assessments, with teachers advised to include a minimum of 3 short-cycle and 1 medium-cycle formative assessments in every teaching and learning program.

During lessons, strategies such as mini quizzes and hinge questions help teachers identify which students need additional modelling or guided practice. Reflective prompts also encourage students to monitor their own understanding, confidence and engagement. At the end of lessons, teachers use exit slips to identify common misconceptions, evaluate teaching and plan what to revisit or adjust next lesson.

“ A lot of it’s around that questioning in the classroom as well, and obviously prompting questions, effectively engaging and checking students’ knowledge as you go along. That’s something that our classroom teachers do really well.”

Colin Campbell
Principal

More structured assessments – such as extended written responses – are used at key points during a unit to support decisions about whether to revisit content, differentiate instruction further or accelerate learning.

Underpinning all of these assessment strategies is a culture of responsive teaching. Teachers routinely check for understanding through questioning and observation, making real-time adjustments to ensure no student falls behind.



⁷ Refer to the Appendix for example teaching and assessment strategies used across the school.

Practice point: Embedding assessment into all phases of teaching

“ I think supporting students during guided learning means constantly referring back to the learning intentions and success criteria, reinforcing the goal of the lesson. What are we actually trying to learn here? The constant roaming and just those check-ins I think are so important for this phase, because how can they move to the independent phase if you're not even sure yet if they're grasping the concept? ”

Alexandra Kelly
Classroom Teacher

Practice point: Using questions to engage students, scaffold learning and check for understanding

“ I try to do something called 'tiered questioning'. So, I start with basic questions, 'Who are the main characters?', then I move into the harder question, 'What phrase from the rubric can we integrate into our thesis statement?' And then when I find kids are stuck, I'll go back to the first phase. I'll go back to the easy questions to build confidence and then I move up. ”

Anya Govender
Classroom Teacher

“ I find that hinge questions are the best, easiest, most effective method in the classroom. ... It can be 1 to 2 questions. Very simple, but you get a very clear picture of who needs a bit more guided assistance, who needs maybe to go all the way back to that modelling phase. ... If you're asking a question and half of your kids are getting that answer wrong, you've got that immediate feedback. ”

Alexandra Kelly
Classroom Teacher

Appendix: Example teaching and assessment strategies

This appendix presents a selection of strategies curated by Doonside Technology High School to support effective explicit teaching. Each strategy is accompanied by a short description of what it is, why it is used and how it supports student learning. These examples are drawn from a resource the school has designed to guide lesson planning, promote consistency of practice and enhance student outcomes.

Example strategies used to support effective explicit teaching at Doonside Technology High School



Strategy Exit slips / exit tickets

What is it?

Exit slips or tickets are short written responses completed by students at the end of a lesson. They are used to check whether students have met the lesson's goals, and help teachers gauge what students have understood and what may need revisiting.

Why use it?

This strategy provides quick, formative feedback directly aligned to the learning intentions and success criteria (LISC). It helps teachers identify who is ready to move on and who needs further support.

How does it work?

Teachers pose a short, specific question related to the LISC (for example, 'Explain how you solved today's problem using the strategy we learned?'). Students respond on paper or digitally. Teachers use the responses to plan follow-up instruction.



Strategy Hinge questions

What is it?

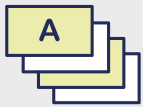
A hinge question is a checkpoint in a lesson used to assess whether students have understood a key concept before the teacher moves on.

Why use it?

They allow teachers to make quick, informed decisions about whether to revisit content or proceed. Responses provide real-time insight into class-wide understanding.

How does it work?

Teachers ask a multiple-choice or short-answer question at a strategic point in the lesson. All students respond simultaneously using whiteboards, cards or digital tools. The teacher uses responses to decide whether to reteach or move forward.



Strategy ABCD cards

What is it?

ABCD cards allow students to give quick, silent, individual responses to a multiple-choice question posed during a lesson. Questions can be planned in advance or posed spontaneously as a mid-lesson check for understanding.

Why use it?

This strategy supports the guided practice and checking for understanding phases of explicit teaching. It enables teachers to identify learning gaps, confirm whether students are ready to move on and make timely adjustments to instruction.

How does it work?

Teachers pose a multiple-choice or binary question (for example, 'true or false') during a lesson. Students respond by holding up A–D cards, mini whiteboards or visual response cards (for example, emoji faces). Teachers quickly scan the responses to identify common misunderstandings and determine whether to revisit content or move on.



Strategy Strategic questioning

What is it?

Strategic questioning involves using higher-order questions – such as 'Why?' and 'How?' – to prompt deeper thinking, check for understanding and extend learning. It can be used with individuals, small groups or the whole class.

Why use it?

Strategic questioning provides immediate feedback on student understanding and helps teachers identify gaps in knowledge or areas that need reinforcement. It also supports adjustments to instruction by highlighting opportunities to extend high-performing students and offer targeted support to students who require further assistance.

How does it work?

Teachers plan purposeful questions aligned to the learning goal. These questions encourage students to explain their reasoning, reflect on their learning and engage with content more deeply. Questions may be delivered verbally or in writing, and teachers can adapt their approach in real time based on student responses.



Strategy
 Learning logs

What is it?

Learning logs are ongoing records where students reflect on their learning over time. They support deeper thinking about content, progress and personal goals.

Why use it?

They develop students’ metacognitive skills and help teachers track understanding and misconceptions across a unit of work.

How does it work?

Students respond to prompts or write freely about their learning in journals or digital folders. Teachers can review logs weekly or at key points to identify patterns and inform instruction.



Strategy
 Reflective prompts

What is it?

Reflective prompts are questions or statements designed to help students think about their learning process, progress or challenges.

Why use it?

They foster metacognition and help students become more aware of how they learn. Teachers can use the responses to guide future instruction.

How does it work?

Teachers ask questions such as ‘What did you find challenging?’ or ‘What strategy helped you succeed today?’ Students respond in writing, via discussion, or digitally. These reflections can be shared or kept private.

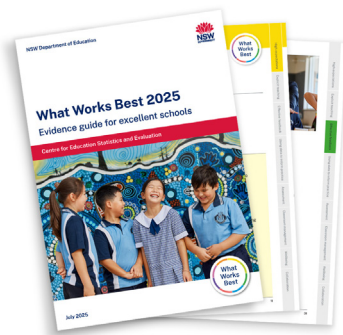


Access the full suite of What Works Best resources

What Works Best 2025 is a suite of resources for teachers and school leaders that outlines 8 effective practices that are known to improve student learning and wellbeing:

- high expectations
- explicit teaching
- effective feedback
- using data to inform practice
- assessment
- classroom management
- wellbeing
- collaboration.

The resources can be used individually or in conjunction with one another to implement evidence-based, quality teaching and learning practices and inform school excellence planning.



The What Works Best 2025 – Evidence guide for excellent schools provides an overview of the evidence that underpins each of the 8 themes.



The What Works Best practical guides translate evidence into practice by providing teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing each of the themes in their classrooms and schools. The guides unpack not only ‘what’ should be done to successfully implement a theme, but also the ‘how’ and ‘why’.



The What Works Best illustrations of practice provide teachers and school leaders with examples of how some of our great schools from across NSW have implemented the themes.

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