

What Works Best 2025

Illustration of practice

Using data to inform practice at Lucas Gardens School

Lucas Gardens School maintains high expectations for their students and staff through the focused, consistent and collaborative use of data. Students at Lucas Gardens School require a high level of personalised support. The whole-school approach to data ensures that students' diverse abilities, accomplishments and goals are visible and understood by staff across the school. Data is essential for monitoring student academic progress, learning engagement and wellbeing. School leaders support teachers and other classroom educators throughout the year with training, coaching and collaboration opportunities to ensure that every student can meet – and surpass – the high expectations held for them.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



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 Lucas Gardens School to facilitate using data to inform practice. It is not intended to capture all aspects of using data 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 using data to inform practice



- What Works Best 2025 evidence guide for excellent schools – Chapter 4: Using data to inform practice
- What Works Best 2025 practical guide – Using data to inform practice



School details

- Lucas Gardens School is a comprehensive co-educational K to 12 school for specific purposes (SSP) located on Wangal Country in inner-west Sydney. The school has a FOEI of 77.¹
- Lucas Gardens School is an educational setting for 78 students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. Many students have more than one identified disability, including physical disability, sensory impairments, complex medical/health needs, behavioural needs and autism. School-based therapists provide support to meet the educational and wellbeing goals of students.
- More than 60% of students come from a language background other than English, and many students are non-verbal.
- Classrooms are organised by ability, needs and stage level, as appropriate. Many classes contain mixed stages to best support students' levels of need. Each classroom has 6 to 8 students with one teacher and one school learning and support officer (SLSO).
- Each student has a learning and support plan (LSP) containing relevant developmental goals relating to communication, regulation, mobility and pathways. In addition to their LSP, each student has specific literacy and numeracy goals relating to NSW K-6 or Life Skills curriculum outcomes.
- Staff at the school include 13 teachers and 14 SLSOs. Part-time support staff and school-based therapists include a physiotherapist, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist, a school counsellor, a librarian and a music teacher.

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.



Strategy 1: Focusing on data having a clear purpose in the classroom

“ [Data] helped us to really know our students. You could talk to any teacher in the school and they would be able to tell you, in detail, what their students can do and how they learn. And I think that’s a really great thing, and I think data has helped inform that they really do know their students very well.”

Sophie Amos, Classroom Teacher

Data informs almost everything at Lucas Gardens School, from the School Excellence Plan (SEP) through to every student’s LSP. While data is used as a powerful improvement measure at the school level, its key purpose is found directly in the classroom as a fundamental tool for teaching and learning. This clear purpose helps school leaders and teachers to make considered choices about what data is needed and how frequently it needs to be gathered so they have the information needed to make timely teaching and learning decisions.

Teachers use data to make student progress visible over a wide range of learning areas, from fine-grained progress to big-picture outcomes. Every student has specific literacy and numeracy goals relating to curriculum outcomes, as well as a LSP that contains specific and measurable communication and wellbeing goals. Teachers use data to inform every goal, establishing baselines and setting desired outcomes across a range of student measures. Goals are often

broken down into smaller measurable steps to monitor incremental progress, revealing when learning trajectories are positive and when they begin to plateau. This use of data can reveal hidden obstacles. For example, analysis could show that a student’s difficulties with literacy and numeracy stem from adjacent challenges in the classroom, such as issues with sensory processing or self-regulation. Teachers use this evidence to inform teaching and classroom adjustments.

Teachers gather data through a range of assessment modes, including classroom observations, work samples, student feedback and photographs of students engaged in learning. While often descriptive, these observation tools are used with structured protocols to generate measurable, quantitative data.² Quantitative data allows teachers to use a range of different analyses to support their students. For example, behaviour scatter plots can reveal patterns in behavioural incidents, helping teachers to identify and minimise potential triggers, and to adjust classroom routines and teaching practice if needed.³

School leaders actively promote having a clear purpose for gathering and using data in the classroom. The principal takes an active role, working alongside teachers to analyse data, solve problems and help students advance their learning.

“ It’s not just collecting data for the sake of data. ... It’s that ‘why’ question, why are we collecting the data? Not because [the principal] said ... what matters is student learning and growth.”

Jenny Zagas, Principal

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- 2 Quantitative data is information that can be presented as a set of numbers from which averages, counts, percentages, differences or totals can be created. It can be useful to answer questions about ‘how many’ or ‘how much’.
- 3 A behaviour scatter plot is a tool for tracking and counting behaviours to help identify frequency and patterns across times of the day. For an example refer to [Behaviour scatter plot \(PDF 235 KB\)](#).



Strategy 2: Developing a shared understanding of data to enable effective collaboration across the school

School leaders, teachers and other staff work together to maintain a shared language and understanding about data across the Lucas Gardens School community. This whole-school commitment, in turn, contributes to continuous and effective collaboration about teaching and learning. It enables teachers – who often have classes made up of students with considerable differences and complexities – to readily share each student’s unique skills, abilities and learning goals. The data collected one year becomes foundational to students’ LSPs in the next, helping teachers establish baselines, appropriate goals and achievable timeframes.

“The collaborative analysis ... is a great opportunity for people – if they’ve got a difficulty with something, people are here to discuss. It’s also an excellent opportunity for new teachers to be supported by more experienced teachers.”

Jen Angelini, Assistant Principal, Curriculum and Instruction

“[The whole-school approach] supports continuity, making sure that everyone is using consistent [data] practices. Being able to share ... what we do together as a school ... it’s all very open, everybody’s really well supported.”

Allison Sidonie, Assistant Principal

School-wide assessment tools allow staff to reveal and effectively communicate student progress. The Literacy and Numeracy Precursors are central to the school-wide assessment toolkit, offering observational measures of student progress and the prompting and/or scaffolding required.⁴ Other school-wide tools include the Roadmap of Communicative Competence (ROCC) and Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence (ABC) assessments.⁵ Using consistent tools makes student data comparable from classroom to classroom and from Kindergarten to Year 12, allowing long-term trends to be identified and long-term goals to be set. Consistent language means any staff member can walk into any classroom and immediately understand what each student is working on and where they are headed.

Data from school-wide assessment tools helps inform close collaboration with other essential school-based and external experts, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. For example, every week, the school-based speech therapist works with teachers in the classroom to identify and track students' communication goals, offering expert advice on strategies and activities for teachers to implement and how to assess their impact.

Data also allows for close collaboration between teachers and families, which is essential for designing and agreeing upon LSP goals.⁶ Student progress is better

communicated when teachers are equipped with specific measures and outcomes to show and explain to families. Yarning with families of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students helps to foster strong connections, laying the foundations for the development of personal and meaningful cultural goals. Clear communication creates more time for listening, helping teachers understand students through families' perspectives.

School leaders provide regular opportunities to foster collaboration between teachers. In Weeks 4 and 9 of every term, scheduled staff meetings are replaced by data collaboration sessions. Teachers come together to discuss data while uploading it to a central system. These sessions take place in the staffroom in an informal way, letting staff openly discuss students' progress and ways to further support and challenge them. The sessions help maintain consistent assessment practices among teachers, building shared expertise across the school.

“ One of the impacts has been that there's now a more standardised system in place ... staff are more confident in the collection of data. ... And I think it's much more at the forefront of your mind ... I think we do it much more regularly and much better than we have done in the past.”

Julia Morgan, Classroom Teacher

4 The Literacy and Numeracy Precursors are a set of indicators that precede the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions. These indicators describe the skills students may need to establish a strong first language and access the literacy and numeracy skills described in the progressions. They were in large part developed collaboratively by teachers and school leaders at Lucas Gardens School and are now available to all NSW public schools. For more information, refer to the NSW Department of Education's [Literacy and Numeracy Precursors](#) webpage.

5 The ROCC supports student communication by producing individual profile graphs of the key goal areas that contribute to communicative competence for students using augmentative and alternative communication, speech or sign. ABC is a model for understanding the factors that contribute to student behaviour. More information about ABC can be found on the NSW Department of Education's [How to complete an FBA](#) webpage.

6 For the purposes of this and other What Works Best practical guides and illustrations of practice, 'families' includes biological parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, kin carers, out-of-home (foster) carers, extended family members and other significant adults with caring responsibilities.

Strategy 3: Creating regular opportunities for staff to strengthen data skills

Providing staff with ongoing support is crucial to maintaining a consistent whole-school approach to data. At Lucas Gardens School, every staff member who collects, analyses or interacts with data is given multiple opportunities throughout the year to further develop their skills. This includes teachers, school leaders and SLSOs.

All new teachers at Lucas Gardens School, ranging from graduates to those with decades of experience, are assigned a mentor to guide them through important school processes. The mentors – typically assistant principals – work closely alongside new teachers to help them to develop a range of skills, including how to use data to support students. Additionally, once per term, all staff are invited to attend a one-hour data-specific professional learning session within school hours. Run by school leaders and/or teachers, the principal attends these sessions as ‘lead learner’, participating in discussions and sometimes leading sessions. The sessions focus on different aspects of using data, including collection methods, types of analysis and visualisation and/or plotting techniques. They often use classroom data to gain real insights to inform teaching and learning.

Teachers are also provided with more individualised support within the classroom. For example, each week the assistant principal, curriculum and instruction (AP, C&I) works shoulder-to-shoulder with teachers, observing and providing support on data collection in the classroom. During regular one-to-one meetings, the AP, C&I and teachers discuss data analysis and assessment. Together, they examine

classroom data and analyse how students are tracking across key focus areas, often creating and refining student goals. Occasionally, the AP, C&I will teach the class, allowing teachers to focus on specific student observations. Supporting teachers to develop skills around consistent judgements is particularly important at Lucas Gardens School, as observational student assessment tools such as the Literacy and Numeracy Precursors require particular expertise.

“Our AP, C&I works really closely with shoulder-to-shoulder teaching and sitting with teachers and doing data talks. We can identify those trends and what’s preventing these students from moving forward to their next achievement.”

Michelle Gray, Assistant Principal

Having a clear purpose for data is always kept front and centre for teachers at Lucas Gardens School. Data provides teachers with information they need to make teaching and learning decisions that help to lift students towards their learning goals and reach the high expectations their teachers hold. Sustaining a whole-school practice is built upon whole-school support. By creating regular opportunities for staff to develop their data skills collaboratively, school leaders have strengthened a collective sense of confidence that using data leads to better outcomes for their students.

“It’s just that importance of creating the culture of staff valuing the data, the collaboration but also understanding, knowing how to use the data and valuing the use of that data. ... That’s when the professional learning comes in, all those different sessions to foster that culture.”

Mitchell Oxley, Assistant Principal

Resources

Strategy 1:

- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Analysis of data and evidence](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Evidence-based practices for students with disability](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Evidence guide for school excellence – quantitative data](#) (PDF 335 KB)
- NSW Department of Education (n.d.) [Evaluation resource hub](#)

Strategy 2:

- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Functional behaviour assessment](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Literacy and Numeracy Precursors](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Evidence of learning](#)

Strategy 3:

- NSW Department of Education (n.d.) [High Impact Professional Learning](#)

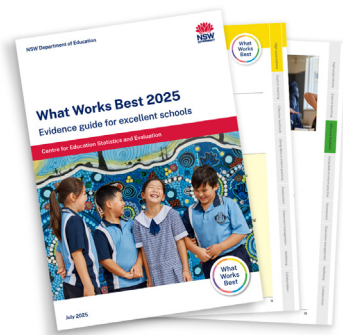


Access the full suite of What Works Best resources

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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