



# Schools as Community Centres (SaCC)

## Annual Report 2024





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# Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our Schools as Community Centres programs are located. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise the enduring connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to Country, culture and community.

We acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal Nations across New South Wales and honour the unique histories, languages and traditions of each. We are committed to walking alongside Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in the spirit of reconciliation and embedding cultural safety and respect in all our work with children, families and communities.





# Introduction

Schools as Community Centres (SaCC) programs are hosted by NSW public schools and led by local facilitators who coordinate a range of community engagement initiatives to support families with young children.

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Currently, 48 NSW public schools host a SaCC program. SaCC programs deliver a wide range of initiatives, including:

- supported playgroups
- early literacy and learning activities
- transition to school strategies
- parenting support programs
- adult learning opportunities
- health and nutrition initiatives.

# SaCC Program Framework

SaCC programs take a holistic approach to early learning and wellbeing through 4 interconnected elements of collaborative service delivery:

- early development of children
- key life transitions
- positive parenting
- safe, healthy and connected communities.

Within the SaCC Program Framework, each school, in consultation with its community, identifies local priorities to improve early learning and wellbeing outcomes for children from birth to 8 years of age. The framework is shown in Figure 1.

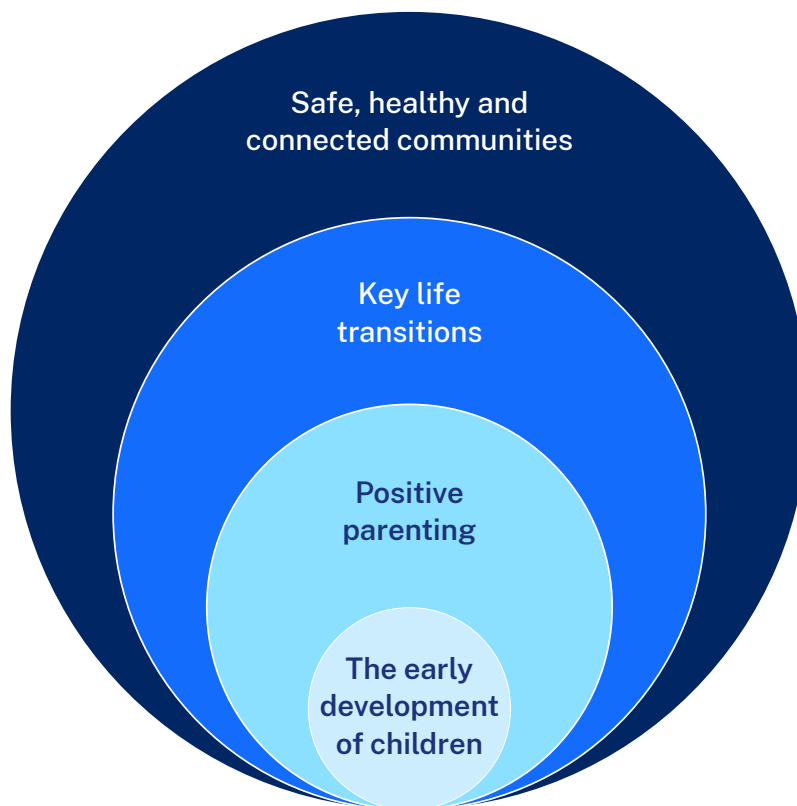


Figure 1 – SaCC Program Framework







# Host schools

The 48 schools who host a SaCC program provide welcoming environments where families with children from birth to 8 years of age can access early learning, wellbeing and parenting support in partnership with local service providers and community organisations. The list below outlines the SaCC host schools by department network, highlighting the reach of the program across metropolitan, regional and remote communities in New South Wales.

## Central Sydney Network

Alexandria Park Community School, Glebe Public School, Marrickville West Public School.

## South Western Sydney Network

Ashcroft Public School, Auburn North Public School, Bonnyrigg Public School, Cabramatta Public School, Canley Vale Public School, Curran Public School, Fairfield Public School, Granville South Public School, Lakemba Public School, Punchbowl Public School, Telopea Public School, The Meadows Public School, Wiley Park Public School.

## Western NSW Network

Bathurst West Public School, Buninyong Public School, Condobolin Public School, Dareton Public School, Dubbo West Public School, Forbes North Public School, Franklin Public School, Glenroi Heights Public School, Narrandera Public School.

## Northern NSW Network

Anna Bay Public School, Fennell Bay Public School, Irrawang Public School, Kempsey West Public School, Moree East Public School, Windale Public School, Woodberry Public School.

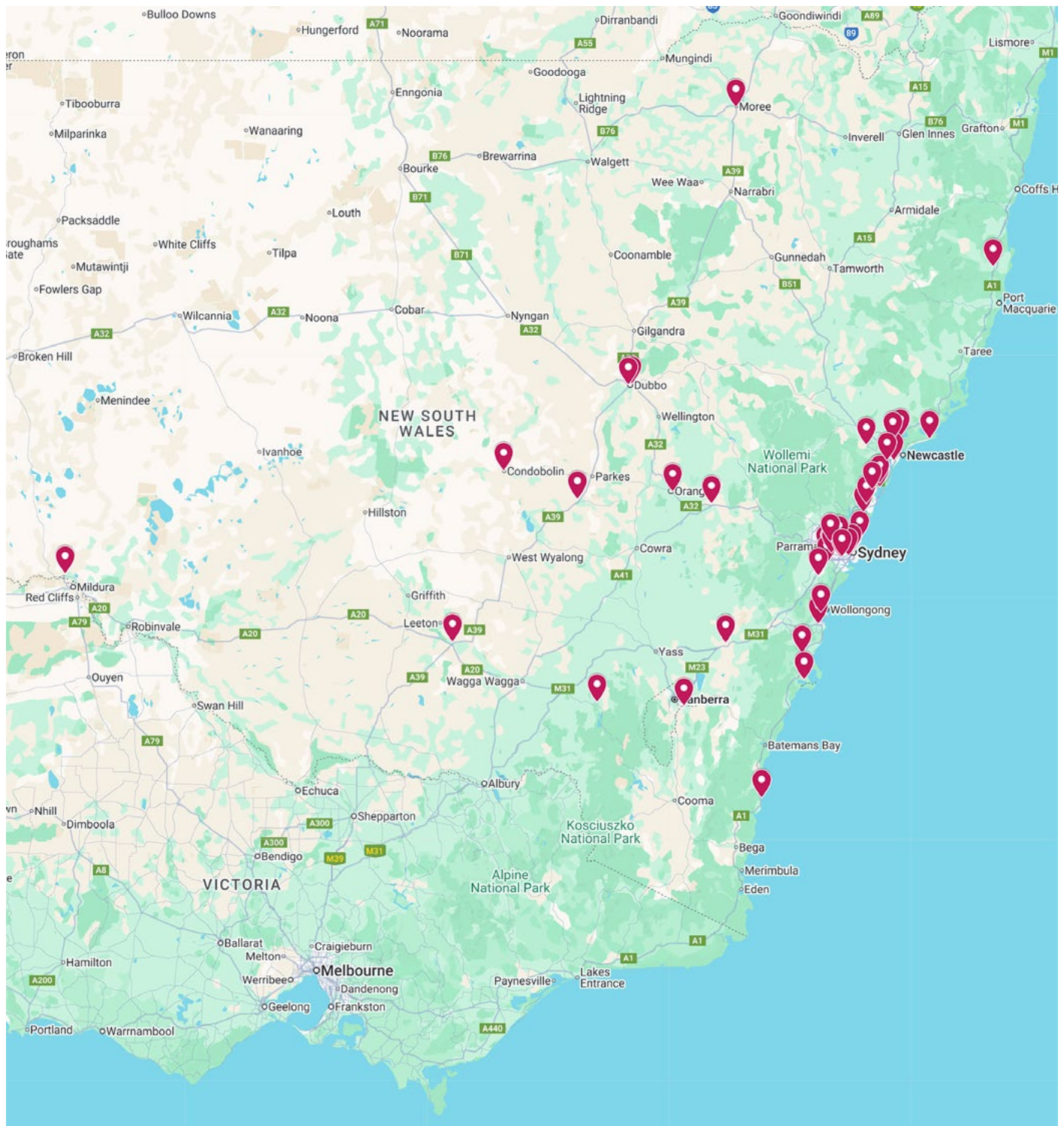
## Illawarra and South East Network

Albion Park Rail Public School, Bomaderry Public School, Farmborough Road Public School, Narooma Public School, Rosemeadow Public School, Sanctuary Point Public School, Southern NSW Network, Goulburn Public School, Queanbeyan Public School.

## Hunter and Central Coast Network

Blue Haven Public School, Cessnock Public School, Gorokan Public School, Northlakes Public School, Woy Woy Public School, Wyoming Public School, Wyong Public School.

Map showing SaCC program locations in New South Wales







# Reporting on outcomes for families with young children

SaCC programs are required to report each year on their progress against performance measures through the SaCC Annual Results Based Report. In 2024, 48 SaCC projects provided data for the Annual Results Based Report. This report summarises and celebrates the results and achievements of SaCC.





# Measuring results for the SaCC program

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Results-Based Accountability (RBA) is used as the state-wide service performance measurement tool. There are 3 performance measure categories (Friedman 2015):

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

Outcomes of local projects are used to inform each school's reporting and planning and to feed into state-wide program evaluation. The data in this report provides evidence for the first 2 RBA questions,

'How much did we do?' and 'How well did we do it?'

Examples are provided addressing the impact of the program. The information gathered was provided by SaCC facilitators and relates to the question, 'Is anyone better off?'







Each SaCC develops its own project outcomes which address the 4 interconnected elements of the SaCC Framework: the early development of children, key life transitions, positive parenting, and safe, healthy and connected communities.

Sample outcomes that cover the 4 program elements are:

- Children's early language acquisition, cognitive development, sense of self and security, emotional regulation and ability to form positive peer and other relationships are maximised.
- Children are set up for success in their schooling through effective transitions.
- Parents and carers have the knowledge, skills and support they need to enhance their nurturing behaviours and positive parenting strategies.
- Parent and carers' confidence and skills are increased as their child's first teacher.
- Family, school and community efforts are integrated so that children grow up in safe, healthy and connected communities.

Schools may also choose to identify additional context-specific outcomes to support the early learning and wellbeing of children identified through the school's planning and reporting processes and community consultation. In 2024, 8,244 families raising children birth to 8 years of age regularly participated in initiatives delivered by SaCC projects.





# 2024 SaCC program report

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Across the 48 SaCC projects, a total of 649 initiatives were provided to children and families in 2024. This reflects a 4.51% growth from 2023. In addition to core initiatives, such as supported playgroups, early literacy programs, parenting support, transition to school activities, adult learning, and health and nutrition programs, SaCC projects also offered a range of locally responsive activities tailored to the unique needs of each community. The information below provides an insight into these initiatives and annual engagement with SaCC programs.





## Children participating in SaCC program initiatives

In 2024, 7,802 children aged 0 to 8 years of age regularly participated in SaCC programs, representing a 13% increase from 2023.

- **4,257** or **54%** of children were aged less than 3 years of age.
- **3,545** or **45%** of the children were aged from 3 years to school age.
- **1,633** or **20%** of children were identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander.
- **2,949** or **37%** of children were identified as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background.
- **838** or **10%** of children aged 5 years of age were identified as having additional needs.

 **13%**  
increase



## Family participation

In 2024, 8,736 families regularly participated in SaCC programs, reflecting a 5.97% increase from 2023 and highlighting continued growth in family engagement.

- **1,633** or **18%** of these families identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- **2,949** or **33%** of these families identified as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background.
- **255** or **2%** of the families are refugees.
- **617** or **7%** of these families had one or more parent aged less than 25 years.
- **561** or **6%** of participants were fathers or male carers.
- **368** or **4%** of participants were identified as grandparents.



**5.97%**  
increase



## SaCC program partnerships

In 2024, 533 initiatives or 82% of all SaCC activities were delivered in partnership with local human service agencies to support families and strengthen community connections. This represents a 3.9% increase from 2023, highlighting ongoing growth in cross-agency collaboration.



**3.9%**  
increase





## Supporting children's development

Early identification of developmental and social-emotional needs is critical to supporting children's growth and enabling families to access appropriate support (Early Childhood Australia 2023:10).

Developmental screening delivered through SaCC initiatives enhanced the early identification of children's needs, supporting timely referrals to services such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Child and Family Health. In addition to supporting children's development and wellbeing, this early intervention empowers families to actively participate in their child's development.

**Feedback:** 'I'm ready to make an appointment for a speech pathology assessment. I just wasn't sure what to do before coming here – thank you.'

## Key life transitions

Supporting children through key early learning milestones is essential for building strong foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing. SaCC initiatives included transition to school programs, early literacy activities and visits to local community services to support children and families during these important stages.

Children demonstrated increased confidence and readiness for school, along with improved social and emotional development. Families formed stronger connections with educators and local services, helping them feel more informed and supported. Shared experiences helped children feel safe in new environments, promoted continuity of learning and strengthened their sense of belonging in the school community.

**Feedback:** 'My child's social skills have improved, and he became more confident. I also met some other families and made new friends as well.'



## Positive parenting

SaCC programs delivered parenting support initiatives with the aim to strengthen parent-child relationships, support emotional connection and promote positive home environments.

Qualitative feedback collected from SaCC facilitators indicates parents and carers developed greater emotional awareness and more effective communication skills. These families indicate children showed more secure attachment, improved emotional regulation and positive developmental progress. Families built supportive connections with local services and other families and gained confidence in their role as their child's first teacher.

**Feedback:** 'The knowledge, skills and experiences improved our family's wellbeing. We follow routines, spend quality time with our children and think differently now. Thank you.'



## Safe healthy and connected communities

2024 SaCC programs included connected communities' initiatives, such as water safety awareness sessions, computer classes and English language courses tailored to support families in everyday life and community engagement. Families who participated have reported building confidence in communicating in English and developed the skills to engage more effectively with school staff and the broader community. Participants improved their digital literacy and awareness of water safety. These learning opportunities also helped to reduce isolation within communities and strengthened connections between families, their children and local support services.

**Feedback:** 'The SaCC programs have provided me many opportunities to learn new skills and greatly assisted with making new friends.'







# Case studies

The following case studies demonstrate the impact of 2024 SaCC program initiatives. They show how schools are supporting families, strengthening community connections and improving outcomes for children.

## Culturally responsive transition to school programs

Culturally responsive playgroups, co-designed with Aboriginal families, provide safe, welcoming environments where families feel respected and supported in their children's early learning. Initiatives demonstrate the strong, collaborative culture that can be fostered between schools and SaCC communities. It reflects the 'ready families + ready communities + ready early childhood services + ready schools = ready children' approach, ensuring all aspects of the transition to school are connected, inclusive and culturally safe.

This work aligns with the NSW Department of Education's Plan for Public Education by placing equity, inclusion and cultural responsiveness at the centre of learning to ensure every child has a strong start to life and learning.

**Feedback:** 'Young Yarns has helped my children connect to their culture and other Indigenous families in our local area.'







## Playgroups supporting confidence and connection

Transition programs developed in response to local data, including AEDC, SEIFA and school-based evidence, supported early learning, wellbeing and family engagement. One example included a targeted playgroup that extended into the child's first year of school, providing continuity for families and strengthening children's confidence and social skills. Families reported feeling more connected to the school environment and better supported in navigating the transition to formal learning. Embedded sessions with local service providers further increased parent confidence in accessing support.

These initiatives highlight the flexibility and quality of SaCC led projects that respond to local needs, promote family connection and align with school priorities. By fostering inclusive and culturally responsive approaches, SaCCs continue to support strong starts to school and deliver on the NSW Department of Education's Plan for Public Education.

**Feedback:** 'The playgroup helped my grandson feel comfortable starting school. I felt supported too, it made the whole transition easier for both of us.'





## Data-driven programs

A targeted oral language initiative was delivered through SaCC in collaboration with kindergarten teachers to support children identified through screening and observational data. The SaCC facilitator and educators analysed the data to identify priority learners and plan a tailored program focused on vocabulary, listening and expressive language.

Pre- and post-assessments showed significant growth in oral language, with teachers reporting improved confidence, communication, and peer interactions. This initiative demonstrates how SaCC's use data to design and deliver evidence-informed programs that respond to local need, strengthen early learning, and align with the Plan for Public Education by placing equity, inclusion and early intervention at the centre of practice.

**Feedback:** 'The Oral Language Program was successful. Although improvement was calculated from pre- and post-assessments, some children made gains in confidence, sharing, and talking to their peers — outcomes that can't always be measured on paper.'







## Supporting early development and family engagement in a changing community

In some rapidly redeveloping urban areas, SaCCs are supporting diverse, dynamic communities, including families from low socio-economic backgrounds and those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In response to rising developmental vulnerability, as reflected in the 2024 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), several sites have strengthened their focus on early intervention and family engagement. Initiatives have included daily breakfast programs, culturally safe playgroups and strong partnerships with local councils and early intervention services.

Parenting programs have supported families to better understand their children's emotional needs, while collaboration with allied health professionals has ensured timely developmental assessments and referrals. SaCC programs continue to play a vital role in fostering trust, inclusion and strong foundations for early learning across diverse and evolving communities.





# Feedback from families

Feedback from families provides authentic insights into the impact of each SaCC project. These insights reflect the core commitment of the SaCC program to support genuine partnership, inclusion and community engagement.



## Safe, healthy and connected communities

'Storytime has allowed my very shy daughter to socialise in a small group with the space not to feel crowded. It gives her fresh air and sun once a week with a running around a bonus. As parents in this group, it's lovely to chat each week and catch up.'



'I joined English conversation class and it's useful to learn about interesting facts and ways of speaking in English and I liked the way we did conversation with friends while playing games. It has improved my confidence.'



## Early development of children

'We noticed a difference even after the first week because no-one had ever told us what things we could be doing. Now he is repeating words at home all the times. He's saying animals and colours.'



'I'm very impressed with the activities incorporated into learning the sounds/letters. The parents feel involved in their child's learning-family community feel safe and welcomed. Also, very encouraging for students/children.'



## Positive parenting

‘The SaCC’s dads’ group has been very important for my family...., both my daughter and I have made friends here, and it’s given me an opportunity to give back to the community.’

‘Learning new tools, gaining understanding about how to be kind to our upbringings, strength my confidence as parent... has been some of the valuable things I learnt in these sessions. Thank you!’

‘The knowledge, skills and experiences improved our family’s wellbeing. We follow routines, spend quality time with our children and think differently now. Thank you.’



## Supported playgroups

‘You make playgroup amazingly fun.’

‘My child started socializing after regularly attending the playgroup.’



## Key life transitions

‘I was a bit hesitant in attending playgroup with my beautiful son as he has quite high needs, and I wasn’t sure if he’d cope. I’m so thankful that we did attend playgroup as it was such a lovely environment and wonderful playgroup staff, I felt by my child attending playgroup it has helped him in starting school this year, in which he seems to be flourishing. Thank you for such a lovely experience.’

‘... a safe space for children to learn, make friends, and feel a part of the school. Our children feel welcomed in the school community.’





# SaCC network day – sharing practice and strengthening partnerships

On 12 March 2024, SaCC facilitators from across NSW came together in strong numbers, with 36 attending a full-day SaCC network event. The network day was focused on connection, professional learning and wellbeing.

The day began with a grounding yoga session and featured presentations and workshops on topics such as music therapy, 3a Abecedarian strategies, the Sounds, Words, Aboriginal Language and Yarning program (SWAY), funding, and play therapy. The event provided a valuable space for collaboration, reflection and the sharing of expertise. Participants welcomed the opportunity to reconnect and learn from each other's work in supporting children, families and communities.

In addition to this annual event, SaCC facilitators attend network meetings twice per term and engage in professional learning aligned to their Professional Development Plans during school holiday periods.



## Reference List

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We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and pay our respect to Country.

**Say hello**

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