First Steps
Department of Education
Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy
2021-2025
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The NSW Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We celebrate First Nations Peoples’ continuing cultural and spiritual connections to Country and recognise the significance of First Nations voices and cultures. The Department of Education would like to pay respects to Elders, past and present and are committed to nurturing First Nations children who are the Elders of our future.

SPECIAL THANKS

The NSW Department of Education has worked alongside the Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Advisory Group to ensure First Nations voices are being heard in the decision making for our children and communities in early education. We would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the following First Nations People who have contributed their invaluable knowledge to support the development of this strategy.

- Emma Beckett  Nikinpa Aboriginal Child and Family Centre
- Maurita Cavanough  Jarjums Preschool
- Deanne Towney  Nanima Preschool
- Sue Freeburn  Ngunya Jarjum
- Gisella Wilson  KU Children’s Services
- Shannon Fusi  Menindee Preschool
- Vickie Parry  Barang Regional Alliance LDM Group (Central Coast) and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
- Tanika Davis  The I Am, Movement
- Sue-Anne Hunter  Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
- George Blacklaws  Previously from SNAICC
- Aunty Anne Dennis  NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
- Kyara Nean  NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charmaine Mumbulla is a Kaurna and Narungga woman from the Yorke Peninsula, with family ties to the Gumbaynggirr people of the NSW Mid-North Coast. Charmaine is passionate about working on projects that support social justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The artwork developed for the Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy is a celebration of children learning and growing in an early childhood environment.
I am thrilled to announce the launch of our Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy. I am incredibly passionate about ensuring every child receives quality early education and care, especially our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

I am committed to ensuring that every Aboriginal child in NSW – no matter where they are from or what their circumstance – has access to a culturally safe and inclusive early childhood education, and that their parents and carers can be confident their child is receiving quality care that maintains and celebrates the culture and history of our Aboriginal communities.

Through the NSW Government’s Start Strong program, I am proud to say that we have made the single biggest investment in the State’s history for Aboriginal children in early childhood education, and the results speak to the success of the program. In the year after its introduction, the proportion of Aboriginal children enrolled for 600 hours in the year before school in all Early Childhood Education settings increased by over 12 per cent, from 80.9 per cent in 2016 to 93.1 per cent in 2019.

Under our Government, more Aboriginal children are attending early childhood education and more funding is being invested than ever before because we recognise that access to two years of quality early childhood education before attending primary school supports critical physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

There is always more to do and quality early childhood education for every Aboriginal child in NSW is a long-term commitment for our Government.

With the launch of this very important strategy, I am committed to working collaboratively on the issues impacting the sector, children, families and communities the most. I look forward to getting out on Country and meeting with families, educators and stakeholders, because I always believe a grassroots approach is the best way to do things.

I’d like to give a special thank you to the members of our Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Advisory Group. Your voice and guidance in the development of this strategy has been invaluable and I want to express my deepest gratitude. With your support and contributions, we are able to connect the national ambitions of Closing The Gap to the reality of what happens in early childhood education services.
and communities across NSW every day. I look forward to continuing the conversation with this group and the broader community to deliver on the strategy.

NSW has come a long way, but we are not going to stop here. I will continue to advocate to ensure Aboriginal children have every opportunity for quality education available to them. I look forward to supporting this strategy to achieve the very best for all Aboriginal children.

Sarah Mitchell
The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC
NSW Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning
The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) is committed to bettering the educational outcomes of our young people. We have been delighted to be involved with the establishment of the NSW Department of Education’s First Steps Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025. This builds upon our partnership agreement between the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc and the NSW Department of Education 2020-2030 and extends the commitment of better educational outcomes for our bubs aged 0-5.

We are proud to have worked as a member of the Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Advisory Group to co-design the First Steps strategy. We believe this strategy will support the development of the early childhood education sector to provide education that is culturally safe and improves the participation and educational outcomes of Aboriginal children.

Catherine Trindall
President NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

It is my pleasure to support the launch of the NSW Department of Education’s First Steps Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025. This strategy affirms our commitment to work alongside First Nation peoples, communities and organisations to improve Aboriginal children’s education outcomes.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal Early Childhood Education Advisory Group who have co-designed this strategy with the NSW Department of Education.

We have made significant improvements in the participation rates of Aboriginal children attending early childhood education in the year before school, however, we know there is still a long way to go. This strategy signals our intent to face the challenges ahead and to work with Aboriginal people, families, communities and organisations to overcome them.

At the heart of this strategy is our commitment to ensure every Aboriginal child and family feels valued and welcomed at any early childhood education service in NSW and for the number and sustainability of Aboriginal community controlled early childhood education services to increase. We will also continue to invest in and evaluate programs to support NSW Aboriginal communities.

The NSW Department of Education is committed the success of the First Steps strategy and we look forward to being a key partner with Aboriginal people in this important work.

Georgina Harrisson
Secretary NSW Department of Education
All Aboriginal children in NSW can access quality early childhood education (ECE) and are supported to embrace their culture and identity for a strong start to lifelong learning.

As Aboriginal people are the Traditional Custodians of NSW, this document refers to Aboriginal people. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different, with their own histories, beliefs and values. It is respectful to recognise their unique identities and cultures. The NSW Department of Education recognises that Torres Strait Islander peoples are First Nation Australians. The Department’s Aboriginal programs and services are available, without question, to Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Any reference to Aboriginal families/kinship also recognises the important role of all carers and leaders within an Aboriginal child’s life. This includes carers, kin, Elders and community.

**OUR VISION**

**OUR COMMUNITY**

**OUR GOALS**

**CHILD**

All Aboriginal children and their families are supported to enrol in quality culturally inclusive ECE.

**FAMILY + KINSHIP**

All Aboriginal families and children feel respected in ECE services as their culture is celebrated and nourished.

**LEARNING**

Aboriginal children are provided access to ECE that drives stronger outcomes through strengths-based approaches and all children have a sense of pride in Aboriginal people, cultures and histories in NSW.
ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

1. Co-design localised solutions with Aboriginal people and communities to increase access and participation in ECE for Aboriginal children across NSW.

2. Increase the number of Aboriginal operated and managed ECE services and ECE services with strong relationships with Aboriginal communities and support their sustainability.

3. Build the diversity of the workforce and create culturally safe learning environments by ensuring growth in the number of Aboriginal educators and teachers.

4. Ensure our funding models in NSW are best placed to enable quality participation of Aboriginal children.

5. Ensure all children in ECE have the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal languages and cultures in NSW.

6. Support services and communities to deliver a culturally appropriate transition into ECE and primary school programs for Aboriginal children.

7. Ensure Aboriginal children with a disability are able to access culturally appropriate support and have access to the same educational opportunities as all children.
**ACHIEVING OUR GOALS**

**FAMILY & KINSHIP**

1. Develop resources and provide guidance to support services to become culturally safe and welcoming spaces for Aboriginal families.

2. Ensure our ECE sector has culturally safe services and a culturally competent workforce.

3. Support holistic wraparound services to Aboriginal children and families.

4. Continue to strengthen the relationships and collaborations between the Department, ECE services and Aboriginal families and communities.
LEARNING

1. Develop a culturally appropriate and place-based approach to assessing the development of Aboriginal children alongside the support of NSW Health and Aboriginal medical services.

2. Lead the provision of professional learning and networking opportunities for ECE sector staff that is relevant to local Aboriginal communities.

3. Support the attendance and engagement of Aboriginal children in ECE to drive outcomes. This includes ensuring Aboriginal children are fully supported to attend a minimum of 600 hours of ECE in the year before school in all service types.

4. Ensure NSW Department of Education staff are culturally competent and work with services in a culturally safe manner.
OUR PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. **95%** of Aboriginal children will be enrolled in the year before school by 2025*

2. **55%** of Aboriginal children will be assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census by 2031*

3. **50%** of Aboriginal children in Early Childhood Education will have access to an Aboriginal language program by 2025*

4. **3%** of Early Childhood and Education Directorate staff will be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

5. **100%** of staff employed in the NSW Department of Education Early Childhood and Education Directorates will have completed or commenced cultural awareness/safety training by 2025

* Closing the Gap target
** NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy
The NSW Early Childhood Education Aboriginal Advisory Group will be central in the governance of this strategy. The Department commits to work alongside the Advisory Group to develop initiatives that address the goals throughout the duration of the strategy.

Figure 1
Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy Governance Structure

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<tr>
<th>AECG</th>
<th>NSW Aboriginal Education and Consultative Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAPO</td>
<td>NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations</td>
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<td>LDMS</td>
<td>Local Decision Making Group</td>
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<td>SNAICC</td>
<td>Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care</td>
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The ECE Advisory Group is made up from representatives of peak bodies, academics and other sector leaders.
For more information please contact:
E ECE.aboriginalengagement@det.nsw.edu.au