

The Australian Early
Development Census

2021 New South Wales data report



Contents

Executive summary	3
Key findings	4
What is the AEDC?	5
NSW snapshot of early childhood development	8
NSW AEDC data	9
State and national AEDC summary indicators	11
Supporting a strong start to school	12
NSW domains in focus	14
Impacts of COVID-19	18
Focus on equity groups	20
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	22
Children with a language background other than English (LBOTE)	24
Using AEDC data to improve outcomes	27
Additional information	31
References	32
Appendices	33

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a data collection program led by the Australian Government. The AEDC data provides a picture of how children are developing by the time they arrive at school, measuring development across the five domains of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based) and communication and general knowledge.

Since 2009, the NSW Department of Education has been responsible for implementing the program across the state. NSW strives for high participation in the program to increase the quality of the data collection and ensure the work of the department takes an evidence-based approach.

Over a decade of data collection has resulted in unique and longitudinal information. This information identifies state and national trends and informs policy makers and practitioners alike to develop initiatives that result in positive outcomes for children and their families.



Census participation

In 2021, NSW had one of the highest participation rates to date, with more than 95,426 kindergarten children, 5,852 teachers and 2,470 schools across three school sectors contributing to the data.

How is NSW tracking?

AEDC results for 2021 show that more than half of children across NSW (55.5%) are developmentally on track on all five AEDC domains. This is in line with national findings.

Similar to national trends, the most significant decrease in the percentage of children on track in NSW between 2018 and 2021 was on the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain.

Compared to the national data, children in NSW are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (10.5% of children in NSW, compared with 11.4% nation-wide).

Together with families, stakeholders and communities, when we reflect on the NSW 2021 AEDC data we need to continue considering:

- How we can use the data to identify and prioritise our work
- How we can use the data to develop initiatives for children and their families
- How the data can help us measure the impact of these initiatives in terms of improved outcomes for children



The AEDC is a national census that tracks how children have developed by the time they start their first year of full-time school. The AEDC is completed once every three years, with the first census collected in 2009 and the latest collection in 2021. The collection represents a unique data set reflecting trends in children's development over time. The Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI), adapted from the Canadian Early Development Instrument (EDI) is the instrument used to collect the data.

The AEDC involves the collection of data across five developmental domains:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- Communication skills and general knowledge

What are the AEDC domains?

The five domains are:

Physical health and wellbeing

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills.

Social competence

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning and readiness to explore new things.

Emotional maturity

Children's pro-social and helping behaviours and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity and inattention.

Language and cognitive skills (school based)

Children's basic literacy, advanced literacy, basic numeracy, and interest in literacy, numeracy and memory.

Communication skills and general knowledge

Children's communication skills and general knowledge based on broad developmental competencies and skills.

NSW has developed professional learning to build awareness of what the AEDC is and how the data can be used. You can access this by visiting the [NSW AEDC website](#).

Why is the AEDC important?

The AEDC provides evidence to support policy, planning and action for health, education, and community support. The AEDC assists schools, early education and care services and community organisations to develop flexible approaches to policy and planning that address the evolving needs of children and families in the future.

AEDC data can be used to start conversations that raise awareness of the importance of the early years, assist with the understanding of developmental vulnerability within the community and provide better support for local children and their families.

How is the AEDC collected and reported?

All schools across the public, independent and Catholic school sectors participate in the AEDC data collection. Kindergarten teachers complete the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI) for each child in their class. Teachers complete the instrument based on their knowledge and observations.

Across each of the five AEDC domains, children receive a score based on teacher responses to domain questions.

AEDC results are reported as the number and percentage of children considered to be developmentally vulnerable, at-risk or on track on each of the five AEDC domains. To determine which children fall into these groupings, AEDC cut-offs have been established based on 2009 AEDC data. Results are reported at the national, state and territory, community, and local community level to help create a snapshot of early childhood development.

Developmentally on track	Children are considered to be developing well. As such, it is desirable to see the percentage of children who are 'on track' increase with each new AEDC collection cycle.	Children who score above the 25 th percentile (in the top 75%) determined using the cut-off points established in 2009, are classified as developmentally on track.
Developmentally at risk	Children are facing challenges in some aspects of their development. Changes in the percentage of children 'at risk' need to be considered alongside changes in the percentage of children on track and developmentally vulnerable. For example, a reduction in those who are developmentally vulnerable could coincide with an increase in those at risk which would signal an overall improvement. Alternatively, a reduction in those who are on track could coincide with an increase in those who are at risk which would signal an overall decline in development.	Children who score between the 10 th and 25 th percentile, determined using the cut-off points established in 2009, are classified as 'developmentally at risk'.
Developmentally vulnerable	Children are facing some significant challenges in their development. As such, it is desirable to see the percentage of children who are 'developmentally vulnerable' decrease with each new AEDC collection cycle.	Children who score below the 10 th percentile (in the lowest 10%), determined using the cut off points established in 2009, are classified as 'developmentally vulnerable'.

Reliability of the AEDC

The AEDC is not a test or a measure of performance for children or schools. Instead, AEDC data is a strong predictor of academic achievement and social and emotional wellbeing during the schooling years ([AEDC Fact Sheet – validity and reliability of the AvEDI](#)).

The Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AvEDI) is

adapted from the Canadian Early Development Instrument (EDI). Studies in Canada have confirmed the EDI as a reliable and valid measure of child development. Prior to implementation of the AvEDI in Australia, a series of [validation studies](#) were completed, including an [adaptation study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#).



How does the AEDC differ from other measures?

The AEDC provides a snapshot of development for children as a group. Kindergarten teachers complete the instrument for children in their class, based on their observations in the classroom. The data collection is completed in Term 2 of the collection year.

In NSW there are two other key data sets that contribute to identifying children's early learning and development on school entry. Firstly, the Transition to School Statement is completed by early childhood teachers and educators to share information about children's learning and development in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework. The statement is completed

towards the end of the year before children attend formal schooling.

Best Start Kindergarten Assessment is a literacy and numeracy assessment conducted for all Kindergarten students in the first five weeks of school. It has been conducted in all NSW public schools since 2010.

All three data sets can be used to support early childhood services, schools, allied health professionals and communities to develop initiatives to improve outcomes for children.

NSW snapshot of early childhood development

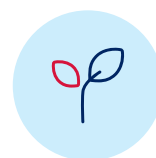
A high percentage of children in NSW continue to be developmentally on track as indicated in the AEDC 2021 data. The percentage of children developmentally on track is the highest in the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain (84.9%). The lowest percentage of children developmentally on track is on the communication skills and general knowledge domain (76.0%). Although the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain had the highest percentage of children developmentally on track, it is the domain that saw the most significant decrease between 2018 to 2021, declining from 87.2% to 84.9%. Each domain saw an increase in the percentage of children developmentally at risk or developmentally vulnerable.

Key findings



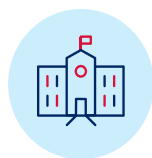
96%

95,426 NSW children participated in the 2021 AEDC collection



5 years, 7 months

Mean age of children who participated



70.6%

from government schools

29.4%

from non-government schools



51.3% boys

48.7% girls



5.3%

children identified as having special needs



15.5%

children require further assessment



69.1%

children are read to regularly at home



89.2%

attended preschool

65.6%

attended long day care

4.8%

attended family day care



7.3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

83% non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

7% children were born in another country

23.5% children have English as a second language

NSW AEDC data

AEDC summary indicators

The AEDC has three summary indicators that can be used to give an indication of the trends in child development across the state. The summary indicators provide insight into developmental vulnerabilities and strengths of children across the AEDC domains.

Two of the summary indicators give a picture of children who are most developmentally vulnerable. The third summary indicator is a strength-based indicator. These AEDC summary indicators are:

Vuln 1	Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains
Vuln 2	Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s)
OT5	Developmentally on track on five domains

In the past, AEDC reporting focused on identifying rates of developmental vulnerability only. In 2021, the AEDC introduced a new summary indicator 'developmentally on track on five domains' (OT5) to reflect a shift to focus on developmental strengths. This summary indicator is a representation of how children have been supported across all areas of their development. This strength-based indicator helps identify where things are working well to support children's holistic

development in NSW. Children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more or two or more domains face potential long term negative implications for their health, academic, economic, and social outcomes. These indicators highlight the fact that substantial support is still needed for these children.

Developmentally on track on five domains (OT5)

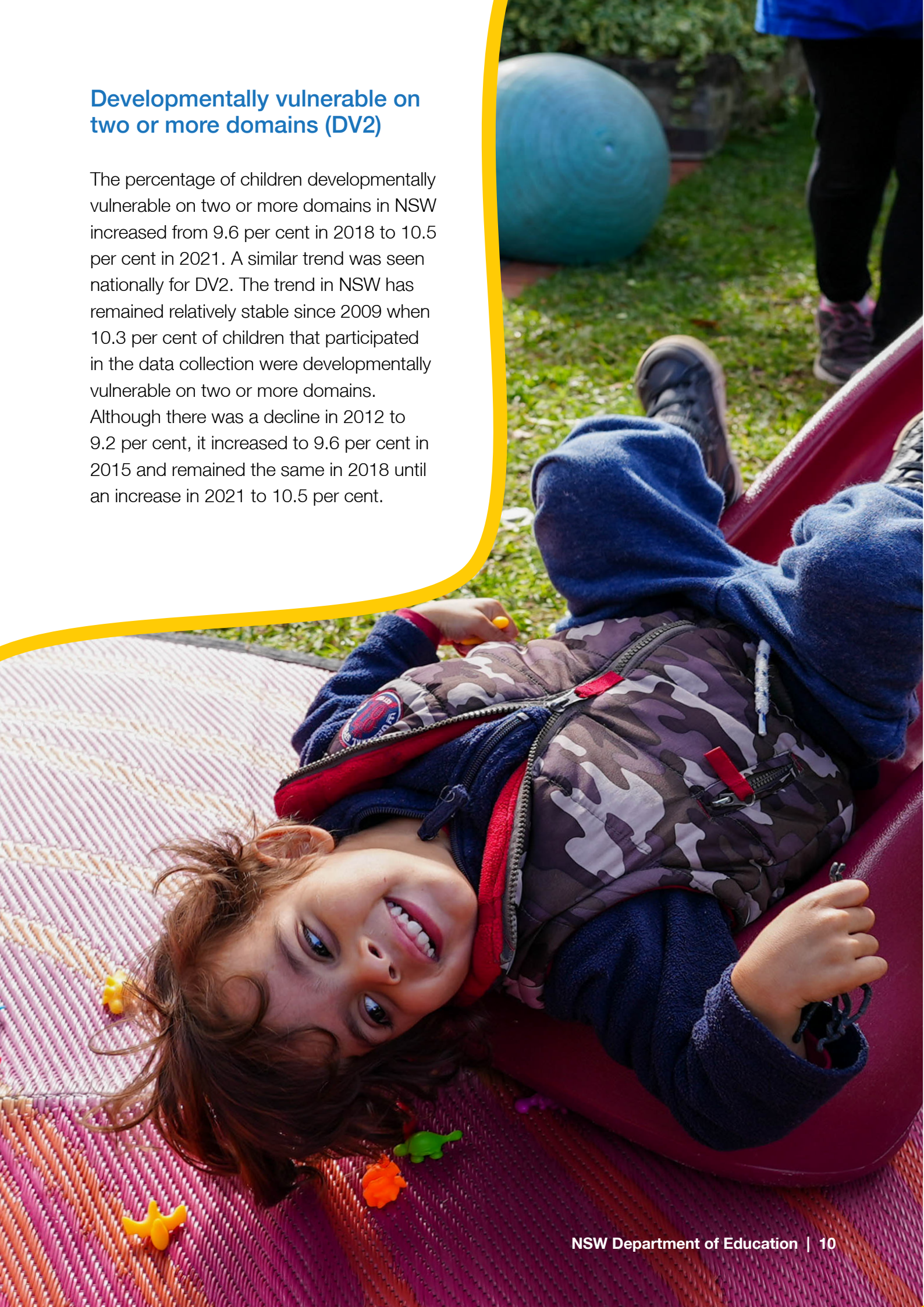
Since the initial AEDC data collection in 2009 children in NSW who are developmentally on track on all five developmental domains has remained above 50 per cent. In 2021, 55.5 per cent of children were developmentally on track on all five domains. However, consistent with the trend for all children across Australia, the number of children in NSW represented across this summary indicator has decreased from 57.2 per cent in 2018 to 55.5 per cent in 2021.

Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) (DV1)

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) in NSW has increased significantly from 19.9 per cent in 2018 to 21.2 per cent in 2021, mirroring national results. NSW trends in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) has fluctuated over the years, however, is now at a similar rate to 2009 results (21.3%).

Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (DV2)

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains in NSW increased from 9.6 per cent in 2018 to 10.5 per cent in 2021. A similar trend was seen nationally for DV2. The trend in NSW has remained relatively stable since 2009 when 10.3 per cent of children that participated in the data collection were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains. Although there was a decline in 2012 to 9.2 per cent, it increased to 9.6 per cent in 2015 and remained the same in 2018 until an increase in 2021 to 10.5 per cent.



State and national AEDC summary indicators

Table 1: Summary indicators and outcomes

Summary indicator		2009	2012	2015	2018	2021	Critical difference 2018 to 2021
		%	%	%	%	%	
Developmentally on track on five domains	NSW	54.8	56.1	55.8	57.2	55.5	Significant decrease ▼
	Australia	50.7	53.6	54.2	55.4	54.8	Significant decrease ▼
Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s)	NSW	21.3	19.9	20.2	19.9	21.2	Significant increase ▲
	Australia	23.6	22.0	22.0	21.7	22.0	Significant increase ▲
Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains	NSW	10.3	9.2	9.6	9.6	10.5	Significant increase ▲
	Australia	11.8	10.8	11.1	11.0	11.4	Significant increase ▲

Significant change has been colour coded: green text represents a positive change, red text represents a negative change.

The critical difference is the minimum percentage point change required between two collection cycles for the results to represent a 'significant change' in children's development. The critical difference varies slightly for the different AEDC indicators but is mainly determined by the number of children in the group being compared (for example, state/territory, community, school).



Supporting a strong start to school

The AEDC data collection instrument includes questions around children's transition to school. Teachers are asked to respond by choosing 'very true', 'somewhat true', 'not true' or 'don't know'. These questions are:

- Would you say that this child is making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school?
- Would you say that this child has parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning?
- Would you say that this child is regularly read to/encouraged in his/her reading at home, as far as you can tell?

The 2021 data indicates that most children in NSW experienced a positive transition to school. Teachers rated children's progress in adapting to school as 'very true' or 'somewhat true' for over 95 per cent of children. Teachers also reported that over 73 per cent of parents are actively engaged with their child's school and almost 70 per cent of children are being read to regularly at home.

Table 2: Child is adapting to school, NSW

Teacher responses	2015	2018	2021
Not true	2.4%	2.5%	2.8%
Somewhat true	20.7%	19.8%	21.2%
Very true	76.8%	77.5%	75.8%
Don't know	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%

Table 3: Parents actively engaged with the school, NSW

Teacher responses	2015	2018	2021
Not true	5.7%	5.3%	5.1%
Somewhat true	20.2%	19.8%	20.6%
Very true	73.7%	74.3%	73.5%
Don't know	0.5%	0.6%	0.9%

Table 4: Child is regularly read to at home, NSW

Teacher responses	2015	2018	2021
Not true	6.0%	6.2%	6.6%
Somewhat true	18.5%	18.5%	19.3%
Very true	73.1%	72.3%	69.1%
Don't know	2.3%	3.1%	5.0%

75.8%

of children adapting to school

73.5%

of parents actively engaged with the school

69.1%

of children read to at home



“

The AEDC is completed once every three years, with the first census collected in 2009 and the latest in 2021. The AEDC represents a unique data set reflecting trends in children’s development over time.

”

NSW domains in focus

AEDC domains

2021 AEDC data shows that more than 55.5 per cent of children in NSW are developmentally on track across the five domains. The percentage of children developmentally on track is highest on the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain (84.9%) and lowest on the communication skills and general knowledge domain (76.0%).

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable was the highest on both the social competence (9.4%) and physical and health

wellbeing domains (9.4%) and the lowest on the language and cognitive (school-based) domain (6.2%).

The percentage of children developmentally at risk on each of the domains represents the difference between the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable and the percentage of children developmentally on track within each domain. Changes in the at risk category should therefore be interpreted in context with changes in these other two categories.

Table 5: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and developmentally vulnerable by domains (in comparison with 2018 data)




































New South Wales	2021 Developmentally on track	2021 Developmentally at risk	2021 Developmentally vulnerable
Physical health and wellbeing domain	78.1% 	12.4% 	9.4% 
Social competence domain	76.1% 	14.6% 	9.4% 
Emotional maturity domain	79.1% 	13.7% 	7.3% 
Language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain	84.9% 	9.0% 	6.2% 
Communication skills and general knowledge domain	76.0% 	15.6% 	8.4% 

Table 6: Percentage of Australian children developmentally on track, at risk and developmentally vulnerable by domains (in comparison with 2018 data)

Australia	2021 Developmentally on track	2021 Developmentally at risk	2021 Developmentally vulnerable
Physical health and wellbeing domain	78.5% 	11.7% 	9.8% 
Social competence domain	75.9% 	14.4% 	9.6% 
Emotional maturity domain	77.0% 	14.5% 	8.5% 
Language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain	82.6% 	10.1% 	7.3% 
Communication skills and general knowledge domain	77.1% 	14.5% 	8.4% 

Significant change has been colour coded: green text represents a positive change, red text represents a negative change. Developmentally at risk has not been colour coded as any changes should be interpreted in context with changes in the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable and on track.

Significant increase (positive) 	Significant decrease (negative) 	No change 	Significant decrease (positive) 	Significant increase (negative) 
--	--	--	--	--



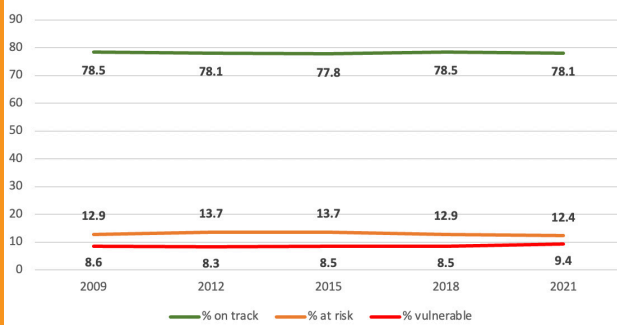
Physical health and wellbeing

The AEDC physical health and wellbeing domain measures:

- Physical readiness for the school day
- Physical independence
- Gross and fine motor skills

The NSW data trend shows an increase in the percentage of children developmentally on track on the physical health and wellbeing domain from 77.8% in 2015 to 78.1% in 2021. There was also an increase in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain between 2015 and 2021 from 8.5% in 2015 to 9.4% in 2021. The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain remains higher than the baseline (9.4% in 2021 compared to 8.6% in 2009).

Figure 1: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and vulnerable on the physical and wellbeing domain



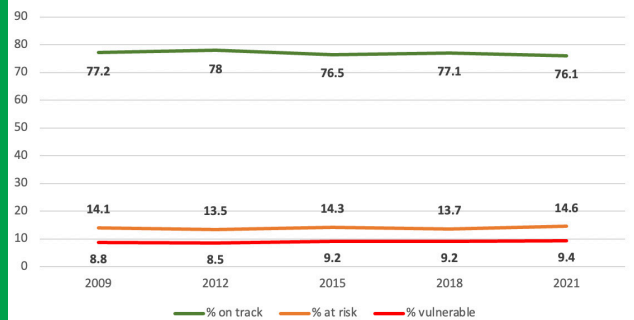
Social competence

The AEDC social competence wellbeing domain measures:

- Overall social competence (peer social skills)
- Responsibility and respect
- Approaches to learning
- Readiness to explore new things

In NSW, developmental vulnerability on the social competence domain has increased from 9.2% in both 2015 and 2018, to 9.4% in 2021. After an initial increase in 2012, the number of children developmentally on track on this domain across NSW has continued to decrease from the baseline of 77.2% in 2009 to 76.1% in 2021.

Figure 2: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and vulnerable on the social competence domain





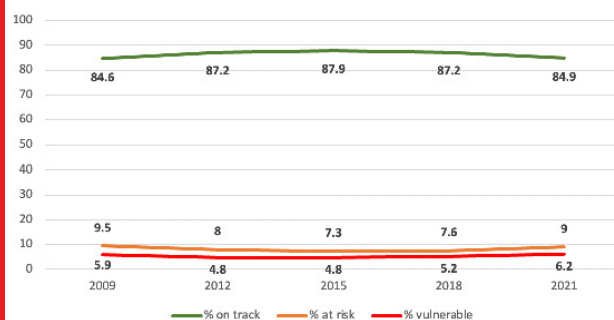
Language and cognitive skills (school-based)

The AEDC language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain measures:

- Basic literacy
- Interest in literacy/numeracy and memory
- Advanced literacy
- Basic numeracy

In 2021, there was a decrease in the percentage of children on track on the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain across NSW, with a drop from 87.2% in 2018 to 84.9% in 2021. The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain has increased significantly from 4.8% in 2015 to 6.2% in 2021. However, when compared to baseline data has increased from 5.9% in 2009 to 6.2% percent in 2021.

Figure 4: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and vulnerable on the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain



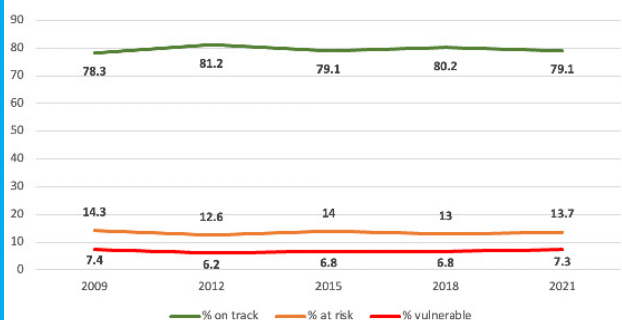
Emotional maturity

The AEDC emotional maturity domain measures:

- Prosocial and helping behaviour
- Anxious and fearful behaviour
- Aggressive behaviour
- Hyperactivity and inattentive behaviour

The NSW data shows that the percentage of children developmentally on track on the emotional maturity domain was the same in 2015 as it was in 2021, remaining at 79.1%. While the percentage of children developmentally on track on this domain has decreased from 80.2% in 2018 to 79.1% in 2021, this remains higher than the 2009 baseline of 78.3%. There was an increase in developmental vulnerability on this domain from 6.8% in 2015 to 7.3% in 2021, however the 2021 percentage remains slightly under the 2009 baseline of 7.4%.

Figure 3: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain





Communication skills and general knowledge

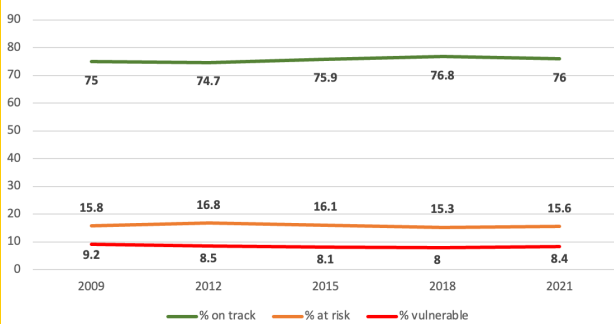
The AEDC communication skills and general knowledge domain measures:

- Skills to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways
- Symbolic use of language
- Storytelling
- Age-appropriate knowledge about the life and world

Despite a decrease in the percentage of children developmentally on track on this domain between 2018 and 2021 (76.8% to 76.0%), children across NSW have remained above the baseline measure of 75.0% in 2009. There was an increase in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain from 8.1% in 2015 to 8.4% in 2021. This is a significant decrease from the baseline which was 9.2% in 2009.

The comparisons between the 2009 baseline and 2021 percentages are significant for this developmental domain. Children in 2021 are on track by a full percentile above the 2009 baseline and less vulnerable than any other domain.

Figure 5: Percentage of NSW children developmentally on track, at risk and vulnerable on the communication skills and general knowledge domain



Impacts of COVID-19

‘Fortunately, in Australia the direct impacts of COVID-19 on young children’s development have not been severe. Despite climbing infection rates following the reduction of public health measures in 2021, severe illness in children is still rare. Of greater concern for children aged zero to five years are the indirect impacts of COVID-19.’ AEDC National Report, 2021.

Additional analysis is required to understand the full impact of COVID-19 on early childhood outcomes. However, early findings have indicated three categories of indirect factors that have impacted on the development of young children.

Child-level factors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to impact on young children’s development. These factors include a decline in young children’s mental health, poorer child health and development, and the impact on early years learning and development outcomes due to restricted access to early childhood education and care services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted family-level factors that provide the stability and security that young children need for healthy growth and development. Job loss and reduced family income has contributed to financial instability and increased household stress for Australian families.

Increased stress, along with a decline in parent mental health and increased levels of abuse and neglect all have an adverse impact on family functioning and child development.

The third category of broader, community-level factors include those influenced by the COVID-19 public health measures, and can have indirect impacts on young children’s development. These factors include isolation from friends and family, reduced access to schools and early learning settings, and reduced access to health care .

At a national level, the AEDC data suggests the impact of COVID-19 may not have been as substantial as expected. The impact, however, does not appear to be evenly felt, with larger increases in developmental vulnerability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children living in the most remote and disadvantaged areas across NSW.

These insights highlight the importance of ensuring young children across NSW are well supported in the years to come. Looking forward, 2024 AEDC data will provide opportunities to reflect on and evaluate the impact of initiatives implemented in NSW following the current data collection.



“

The percentage of children living in major cities on track on all five developmental domains declined from 57.0% in 2018 to 55.9% in 2021, while children living in very remote areas of NSW saw a significant decline from 53.9% in 2018 to 39.2% of children on track on five domains in 2021.

”

Focus on equity groups

‘Children and young people have unique abilities, skills, and life experiences. Differences in backgrounds, personality and beliefs shape a child’s experiences and needs.’ *Victorian Government (2022)*

Children’s learning and development can be influenced by the circumstances in which they grow up, such as their cultural background, their socioeconomic status, or where they live.

AEDC data provides insights into how factors such as remoteness, Aboriginality, socio-economic status, and language background other than English can impact early childhood outcomes.

AEDC data can be used to support schools, early childhood services and communities to establish equitable practices for all children. When children from specific demographic groups or certain types of schools or early childhood services consistently show poorer outcomes, it suggests they are experiencing educational disadvantage. This provides opportunities for our education system to reflect on practice and develop appropriate responses.

The 2021 NSW AEDC data showed an increase in developmental vulnerabilities for children from various equity groups. Mapping AEDC outcomes against factors such as remoteness and socio-economic status provides more understanding of outcomes for some children and contributes to the development of appropriate responses.

Socio-economic disadvantage

In the AEDC, socio-economic disadvantage is measured using the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). SEIFA is a measure developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that ranks geographical areas in Australia according to their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The SEIFA indexes are based on information from the ABS national, five-yearly census. SEIFA ranking is commonly used to:

- determine areas that require funding and services
- identify new business opportunities
- research into the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and various health and educational outcomes.

SEIFA scores are divided into quintiles, where Quintile 1 represents the highest levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and Quintile 5 reflects the lowest levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

The 2021 AEDC NSW data shows that for Quintile 1, children living in the most disadvantaged areas, there was an increase in developmental vulnerability for each of the five domains. Children in the most disadvantaged locations (Quintile 1) were twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable across five domains than children living in the most advantaged

areas (Quintile 5). The domains with the greatest increase in developmental vulnerability for children from disadvantaged areas (Quintile 5) were physical health and wellbeing (13.1% in 2018 to 15.1% in 2021) and language and cognitive skills (school-based) (9.9% in 2018 to 11.6% in 2021). This overall trend in NSW is consistent with the trend across Australia.

Table 7: Relationship between SEIFA category and developmental vulnerability in NSW

SEIFA Quintile	Vuln 1		Vuln 2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Quintile 1 (most disadvantage)	5,808	31.0 ▲	3,260	17.4 ▲
Quintile 5 (least disadvantage)	3,191	14.6 ▲	1,379	6.3 ▲

Remoteness

In 2021, children living in the most remote areas of NSW had increased rates of developmental vulnerabilities on all five AEDC domains, compared to their counterparts in major cities. The percentage of children on track on five domains in major cities declined from 57.1 per cent in 2018 to 56 per cent in 2021 while children in very remote areas of NSW saw a significant decline from 53.9 per cent in 2018 to 40.3 per cent in 2021 of children on track on all five domains.

In 2021, NSW children living in the most remote areas were more likely than those living in major cities to be developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (48.7% versus 20.5%). Children in remote areas of NSW also had a greater increase in developmental vulnerability on one or more domains and two or more domains. The percentage of children living in major cities who were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains was 10.0 per cent versus 27.6 per cent for children living in remote areas of NSW.

Table 8: Relationship between remoteness and developmental vulnerability in NSW (2021)

SEIFA Quintile	Vuln 1		Vuln 2	
	Number	%	Number	%
Major cities	14,019	20.5 ▲	6,893	10.0 ▲
Very remote	37	48.7 ▲	18	25.7 ▲

Legend:

Significant increase (positive) ▲	Significant decrease (negative) ▼	No change ■	Significant decrease (positive) ▼	Significant increase (negative) ▲
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	----------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2021, 6,274 children in NSW that participated in the AEDC identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This is an increase from 6.6 per cent in 2018 to 7.3 per cent in 2021. The 2021 data shows that there was an increase in the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains from 34.1 per cent in 2018 to 37.2 per cent in 2021. The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains increased from 20.0 per cent in 2018 to 22.3 per cent in 2021.

A similar trend is observed with the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on track on all five AEDC domains. NSW reported a decline from 42.2 per cent to 38.8 per cent.

The 2021 AEDC data shows that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW attended preschool and over half are making good progress adapting well to school.

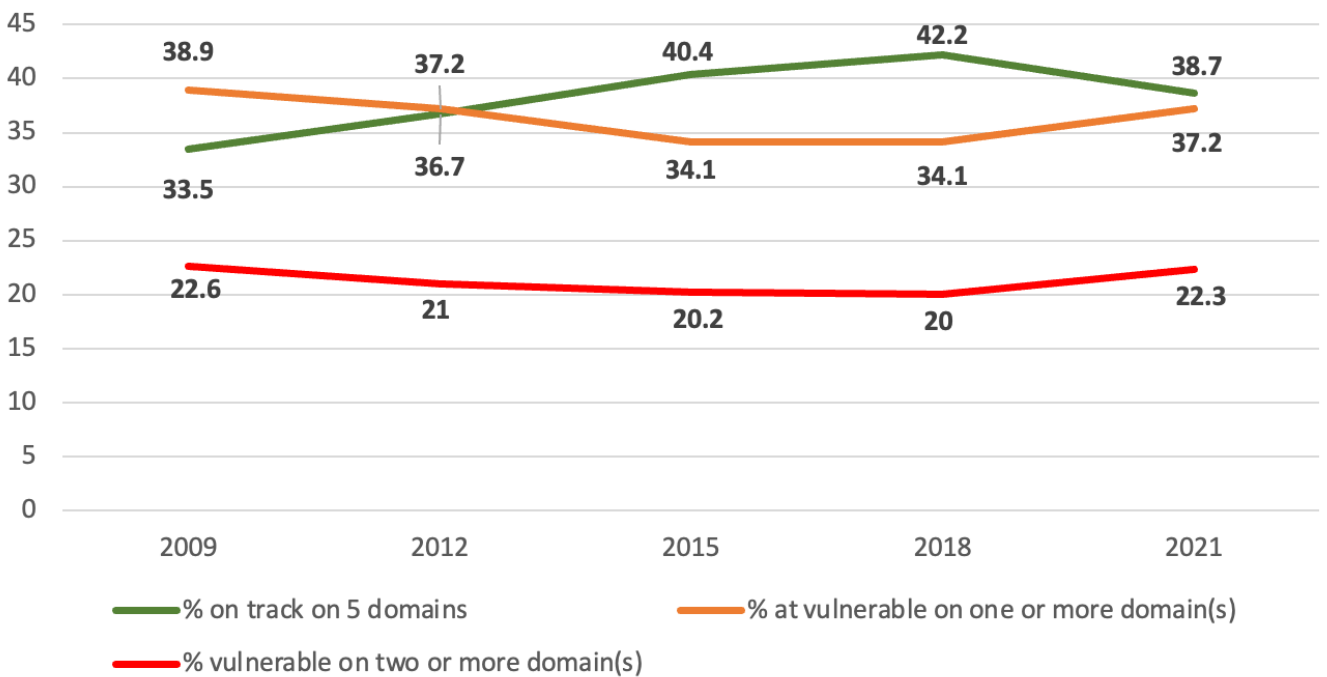
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to be developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) (37.2% and 20.0% respectively), and twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains than non-Indigenous children (22.3% and 9.6%, respectively).

We acknowledge that there are multiple and additional disproportionate barriers and complexities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a rich culture, with their own histories, beliefs and values.



In 2021, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW were most likely to be developmentally on track on the emotional maturity domain (68.4%). The social competence domain had the lowest percentage of Aboriginal children on track in NSW (63.1%). Aboriginal children in NSW experienced the most significant increase in developmental vulnerability on the language and cognitive skills (school-based) domain from 13.6 per cent in 2018 to 17.3 per cent in 2021. Overall in 2021, Aboriginal children were most likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the physical and health wellbeing domain (19.6%).

Graph 1: NSW data for Aboriginal students



Children with a language background other than English (LBOTE)

In NSW there was a slight decrease in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains and two or more domains for children with a language background other than English (LBOTE).

Developmental vulnerability on one or more domains for children with a LBOTE who are proficient in English decreased from 16.9 per cent in 2018 to 16.6 per cent in 2021. For children with a LBOTE who are not proficient

in English, developmental vulnerability on one or more domains also decreased from 94.1 per cent in 2018 to 93.4 per cent in 2021.

The percentage of children with a LBOTE who were on track on all five domains decreased slightly from 2018 to 2021, however has increased significantly since 2009. This applied to those who were proficient and not proficient in English.

Table 9: Developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) LBOTE in NSW

Language diversity	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
LBOTE	28.0	26.4	25.1	23.8	23.4
Proficient in English	18.5	17.9	17.7	16.9	16.6
Not proficient in English	94.2	94.0	93.8	94.1	93.4
English only	19.2	17.7	18.3	18.1	20.0
Proficient in English	16.9	15.6	16.2	16.3	17.7
Not proficient in English	94.5	92.8	93.5	94.6	93.5
Very remote Australia	41.3	32.1	34.4	23.6	48.7

Legend:

Significant increase (positive) 	Significant decrease (negative) 	No change 	Significant decrease (positive) 	Significant increase (negative)
-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	---------------	-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Table 10: Developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains LBOTE in NSW

Language diversity	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
LBOTE	13.1	11.9	11.9	11.3	11.5
Proficient in English	7.5	6.8	7.2	6.9	7.1
Not proficient in English	51.8	53.2	55.9	56.4	57.5
English only	9.4	8.2	8.7	8.8	10.0
Proficient in English	7.4	6.6	6.9	7.2	8.0
Not proficient in English	72.6	69.3	72.2	75.2	74.6
Very remote Australia	20.7	20.0	19.2	9.0	27.6

Table 11: Developmentally on track on five domains LBOTE in NSW

Language diversity	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
LBOTE	46.9	48.1	50	52.1	51.7
Proficient in English	53.6	54.1	55.3	57.1	56.7
Not proficient in English	0.3	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.6
English only	57.3	58.9	58	59.6	57.3
Proficient in English	59.1	60.5	59.6	61	59.2
Not proficient in English	0.5	0.9	0.2	0.5	0.3

Legend:

Significant increase (positive)	Significant decrease (negative)	No change	Significant decrease (positive)	Significant increase (negative)
---------------------------------	---------------------------------	-----------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------



Children with special needs

As part of the AEDC data collection, teachers complete the instrument and demographic information on children with special needs to enable communities to be responsive to all children in their community. However AEDC results are not reported for children with special needs. In the AEDC, children with special needs are classified as those who have chronic physical, medical, or

intellectual disabilities that require special assistance, based on medical diagnosis. The percentage of children who have a special needs diagnosis has increased from 4.3 per cent in 2009 to 5.3 per cent in 2021. This trend reflects the national trend where it has increased from 4.4 per cent in 2009 to 5.2 per cent in 2021.

Children needing further assessment

Children identified by teachers as ‘needing further assessment’ are children that are currently being assessed or need further assessment based on information provided to the teacher by a parent or guardian, allied health professional or through teacher observation. Further assessments may include medical, physical, behaviour management, emotional or cognitive development assessments. Children identified as needing further assessment who do not have a special needs diagnosis are included in calculations for AEDC results

including summary indicators and domain results. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of children requiring further assessment from 12.1 per cent in 2018 to 15.5 per cent in 2021. This is consistent with the ongoing increase in the percentage of children identified as needing further assessment since the AEDC data was first collected in 2009. The trend has grown from 10.3 per cent in 2009 to 15.5 per cent in 2021. This trend is similar across Australia with the increase going from 10.7 per cent in 2009 to 16.3 per cent in 2021.

Graph 2: NSW data for children with special needs

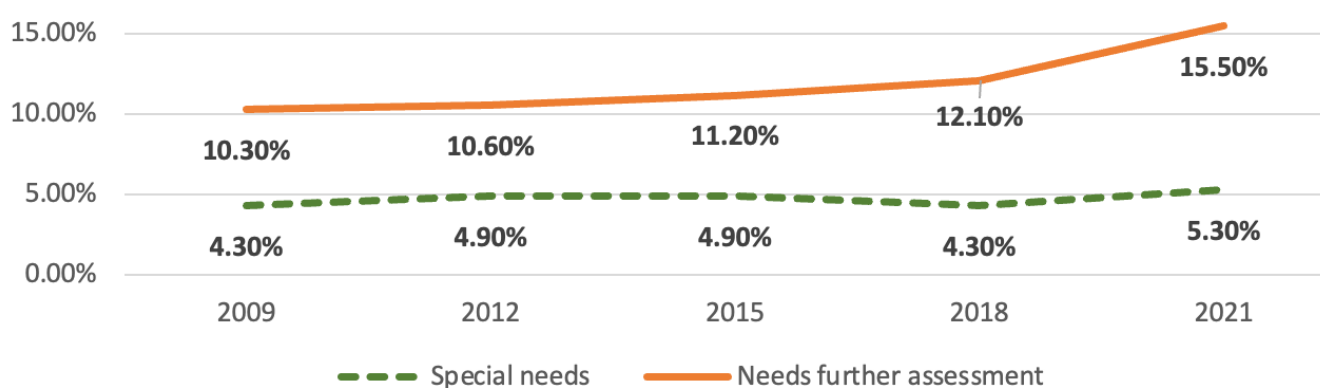


Table 12: Australia wide data

	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Children with special needs status	4.4%	4.9%	4.7%	4.6%	5.2%
Children in need of further assessment	10.7%	10.5%	11.8%	13.3%	16.3%

Using AEDC data to improve outcomes

The AEDC data provides guidance on key areas where schools, early childhood education and care services, allied health professionals and community organisations can focus resources and target support to address early childhood development needs. The NSW AEDC team has developed a range of professional learning, resources and advice to support stakeholders to engage with the data and improve outcomes

for children within their community. One of these initiatives includes a community grants program. The stories below show how recipients have responded to their community's AEDC data and developed targeted initiatives to improve outcomes for children and their families. Many of the programs involve collaboration between families, schools, early education and care services, and community organisations.

A strong start to school

Effective initiatives that support a strong start to school involve collaborative partnerships with early childhood services, families, and other professionals. The [strong and successful start to school guidelines](#) highlight the importance of these partnerships to transfer information from one setting to another through open and honest conversations. Accessing local AEDC data provides an opportunity to initiate and inform transition partnerships and conversations.

As an AEDC grant recipient, Adamstown public school have used their local AEDC data to initiate these conversations. Teachers

at the school have created a collaborative team-teaching approach with local early childhood teachers to ensure all students enrolling into the school are known, valued, and cared for. The network is guided by high quality transition to school practices such as understanding how children learn in early childhood settings and how it connects with the school curriculum. Along with information shared between educators and families, the network uses AEDC data to inform what children know, the developmental domains where children are on track and the domains requiring targeted support.

AEDC developmental domain focus of initiatives:

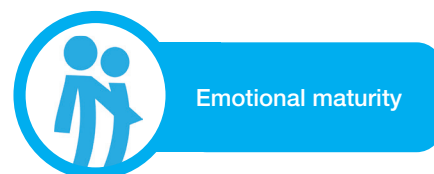


Connecting with community

The NSW Department of Education's vision is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW access quality early childhood programs and are supported to embrace their culture and identity for a strong start to lifelong learning. The [NSW Aboriginal Children's ECE First Steps strategy](#) identifies the importance of co-designing localised solutions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The strategy also includes the importance of developing culturally appropriate and locally relevant approaches to assessing the development of Aboriginal children to increase access and participation in early years programs.

Bermagui Public School, on the south coast of NSW, have used a combination of First Steps strategies with their local AEDC data to develop programs that commit to ensuring the best educational outcomes for children. Teachers have used the community grant program as an opportunity to extend the capacity of their small school to move beyond the school gates and work on country with local organisations. The program initiates co-designed, culturally inclusive play sessions to engage with children and families and fast track support.

AEDC developmental domain focus of initiatives:



Early intervention initiatives

The NSW Department of Education commits to making inclusive education real for all children. [The Inclusive education policy](#) ensures early intervention initiatives focus on integrating supports to meet the needs of young children and their families. These practices can extend across various settings, such as preschools, playgroups, and the early years of school.

Programs such as playgroups have potential to be soft entry points linking families to

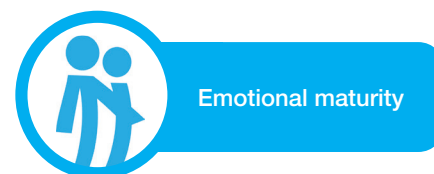
formal supports when needed and to deliver key messages promoting child health. This multidisciplinary approach uses the collective knowledge of specialist teams to meet the needs of children and their families. The AEDC provides a rich source of information to inform the programming, policies, and planning of these initiatives.

Both Woodbury School as Community Centre (SaCC) and Big Sky Stories Ltd. have used the AEDC grant program

as an opportunity to target support to families in their communities. The Early Access for Success program facilitated by Woodbury SaCC aims to strengthen connections between multiple agencies in the area. The program breaks down socio-economic barriers and through their centre, ensures children have access to early learning opportunities, speech and language assessments, and therapies.

Big Sky Stories Ltd have partnered with local playgroups to create a 'Resource Outreach' kit. These kits are designed to encourage and enhance young children's engagement with language and quality texts. The kits will facilitate activities with families at playgroups that encourage talk, imaginative play and reading. Staff will initiate conversations with caregivers and provide take home resources to encourage their role as first teachers.

AEDC developmental domain focus of initiatives:



Building capacity

It is important to acknowledge the impact of professional learning initiatives for those who support young children and their families. The [NSW Department of Education's professional learning policy](#) supports building the capabilities of education professionals to ensure they are equipped with the information and skills they need to do their job well. When communities engage with AEDC data to identify developmental vulnerabilities for children, they can tailor professional learning opportunities to address these needs.

Berkely Public School in the Wollongong region, Gamumbi Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC) in Toormina and Dragonfly Speech Pathology located in Lake Macquarie have all demonstrated how engaging in professional learning and sharing expertise

can contribute to achieving high quality programs for children. All three organisations have developed initiatives to build the capacity of teachers and educators. The initiatives are reflective of local AEDC data and target the domains to support young children to stay on track.

The Berkeley Public School Resilience Project provides whole school professional learning in trauma informed practice. The projects support teachers to be responsive to student needs and ensure they stay on track across the language and cognitive skills (school-based), communication skills and general knowledge, emotional maturity, and social competence domains. Gamumbi ECEC engages with both the Hanen Teacher Talk program and keyword sign to

build the capacity of educators to identify language and communication vulnerabilities. The program enables educators to support children to become confident and capable communicators in their setting. The Ripple Project facilitated by Dragonfly Speech is a partnership with schools and early childhood services in the local community. As part of

the project, a qualified speech pathologist collaborates with teachers and educators to extend their own knowledge of speech and language milestones. This enables increasing confidence in educators to provide language-rich learning environments that children can thrive in.

AEDC developmental domain focus of initiatives:



Communication skills
and knowledge



Language and
communication skills
(school-based)

For a full summary of the 2021 AEDC NSW community grant programs and initiatives, including their developmental domain focus, see [Appendix 1](#).



Additional information

Accessing AEDC data

AEDC data explorer

To access and explore AEDC data visit the [AEDC data explorer website](#). Data is available by suburbs or communities and can be accessed as tables, graphs, maps, and detailed community profiles.

AEDC data for NSW Department of Education

AEDC data is an important source of information for schools across NSW. To allow easy and ongoing access for NSW Department of Education school staff and leaders, AEDC NSW has added school profiles and addendum on SCOUT. Information to explain how to access this is available via the [AEDC NSW report webpage](#). AEDC macrodata and microdata are available under application. More information on the application process is available on the [AEDC national website](#).

AEDC NSW resources

A range of resources providing information and case studies to support schools and early childhood and care services is available on the [NSW AEDC website](#).

AEDC NSW microlearning course

AEDC NSW has developed a professional learning course that comprises of 8 modules.

Each module takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and can be completed at different times. The course provides an interactive way to understand what the AEDC is and how to interpret and engage with the data. Modules 1-8 are available for all stakeholders to access on the [AEDC NSW webpage](#) and on MyPL.

For more information on how to access this professional learning, visit the [AEDC NSW professional learning and events website](#).

AEDC Podcast

As part of the Early Learning matters podcast, AEDC NSW has recorded a two-part podcast to unpack the AEDC and explore how to engage with the AEDC data. To access the podcast, visit the [Early Learning matters podcast website](#).

AEDC symposium

Since 2021, AEDC NSW has delivered an annual research symposium. The symposium is an opportunity to share research, resources, and examples of practice with various stakeholders. The symposium sessions are targeted to meet the needs of educators, researchers and professionals from schools, early education and care services, government agencies, university researchers and research institutes.

To view symposium sessions, visit the [AEDC NSW professional learning and events website](#).

References

- Australian Government – Department of Skills, Education and Employment (DESE) (Accessed 2022 December 19). About the AEDC. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc>
- Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) (accessed 2022 November 1). Equity in Education. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/our-work/current-projects/equity-education>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022, May 6). Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas. <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa>
- Australian Government – Department of Skills, Education and Employment (DESE) (Accessed 2022 September 1). The AEDI and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc/history/validation-and-trial-of-the-aedi/the-aedi-and-indigenous-children>
- Goldfeld, S., O'Connor, E., Sung, V., Roberts, G., Wake, M., West, S., & Hiscock, H. (2022). Potential indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children: a narrative review using a community child health lens. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 216 (7): 364-372. doi: 10.5694/mja2.51368
- Gregory, T., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, S. (2021). About the reliability and validity of the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (AEDC Fact Sheet). Australian Government, Canberra. Available at <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/validity-and-reliability-of-the-avedi>
- NSW Department of Education (2022 August 30). Transition to school. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/transition>
- NSW Department of Education (2022 August 30). First steps – the NSW Aboriginal Children’s Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021 – 2025. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/making-services-accessible-for-all-children/aboriginal-access/strategy>
- NSW Department of Education (2022, September 1). Inclusive education for students with disability. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/disability-learning-and-support/our-disability-strategy/inclusive-education>
- NSW Department of Education (2022, August 30). Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/australian-early-development-census>
- Victorian Government (2022, August 25). Victoria Schools - diversity and equity guidance. <https://www.vic.gov.au/schools-diversity-equity-guidance>

Appendices

Appendix 1: AEDC Community Grants projects and domain focus – Round one

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Adamstown Public School Adamstown 2289	Building Blocks	Support children and families to improve communication and language development that enables a successful transition to school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Emotional maturity (connection)
Ambrose Early Learning, Santa Sophia Box Hill	Prosocial Play Support Program	Increased participation and engagement in language experiences alongside their peers with teacher support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Social competence • Emotional maturity • Communication skills and general knowledge
Berkeley Public School Berkeley NSW 2506	Resilience Project at BPS	Development of staff capacity and increased access to sensory tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health and wellbeing • Emotional maturity • Communication skills and general knowledge • Social competence • Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
Bermagui Public School Bermagui NSW 2546	Ganandhimila-nj – We learn (Dhurga language)	Transition program based on evidence-based programs, such as the 3as Abecedarian approach, combined with the needs and aspirations of local families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health and wellbeing • Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
Big Sky Stories Ltd Broken Hill 2880	Big Sky Stories Outreach Kit for Local Playgroups	Development and production of introductory materials to support and contribute to existing local playgroup services, enabling collaboration with local services and provide details of the proposed initiative and establish collaborative partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Communication skills and general knowledge

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Cudal Community Children's Centre Cudal 2864	School Readiness supported by Allied Health Services	Increased school readiness & increased attendance at Preschool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills and general knowledge • Physical health and wellbeing
Dragonfly Speech Pathology working in partnerships with other services and professionals Valentine 2280	The Ripple Project Children connecting through communication to their educators, parents and community.	The Ripple Project aims to improve the quality of interactions between educators and the children enrolled in their centres, the teachers and children enrolled in the school transition and kindergarten programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills and general knowledge • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Social competence
Early Links Inclusion Support Service Maitland 2320	Tools and Training for Comprehensive Developmental Assessments in the Hunter Region	Increased access to early intervention supports across all AEDC developmental domains.	All five domains
Fairfield City Council Wakeley NSW 2176 (Fairfield)	Partnerships for Early detection, intervention and family supports	Preschool-age children will be participating in the project for assessment and support in preparation for transition to school in 2023.	Awaiting project plan
Gamumbi Early Childhood Education Centre Incorporated Toormina 2452	Supporting language. Supporting learning.	Hanen Teacher Talk - Explicit teaching for educators to support children's language and communication development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Communication skills and general knowledge
Inverell District Family Services (IDFS) Inverell 2360	IDFS Confident and Capable Preschool Program	Increased access for all children to a recognised successful Mindfulness and Positive Psychology program being Peaceful Kids.	Awaiting project plan
Milton Therapy and Learning Centre Milton 2538	Is your toddler talking?	Increased confidence in educators and parents in their knowledge of language and communication skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Communication skills and general knowledge

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Schools as Community Centre (SACC) working in partnership with Woodberry Public School and local community services Woodbury 2322	Early Access for Success Program	Increase in children receiving assessment and intervention	All five domains
Toukley Public School Toukley 2263	Supported playgroup initiative	The supported playgroup will provide opportunities for children to develop social connections in an environment where parenting practice and child engagement can be influenced, we can encourage and support all parents to monitor their child's behaviour and provide a non-judgemental and connected environment for the children.	All five domains Focus on social competence

Appendix 2: AEDC Community Grants projects and domain focus – Round two

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Branxton Preschool Branxton NSW 2335	Community Hub	Building staff capacity and increasing access to speech and occupational therapy services and screening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and wellbeing Language and cognitive skills (school-based) Communication skills and general knowledge
Catholic Early Learning Centre St John XXIII Parish – Glenwood-Stanhope Gardens Stanhope Gardens NSW 2768	Physical health/ Well-being Pro Social Play	Active participation of children in language and physical based play experiences to support children's development and transition to school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and wellbeing Social competence Communication skills and general knowledge

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Cawdor Public School – Camden network Cawdor NSW 2570	Staff Capacity Development	Increased staff training and community engagement to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and wellbeing Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre Chester Hill NSW 2162	Allied health support at Playgroup	Increased access to early intervention support by offering speech therapy, occupational therapy, and nutritionist services at playgroup.	All five domains
Coolah Preschool Kindergarten Inc Coolah NSW 2843	Engine Room Educator Capacity Building Program	Building the knowledge and skills of educators to identify developmental needs and implement programs to address these needs.	All five domains
Dubbo and District Preschool Dubbo NSW 2830	Get Set for School Program	Weekly participation in small groups with an occupational therapist and educators regarding individual skill development and sensory integration in a fun movement-based program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and wellbeing Social competence Emotional maturity Language and cognitive skills (school-based)
Garfield Street Children’s Centre Five Dock NSW 2046	Self-Publishing for children – children as author, illustrator, subject	Partnering with local artists to empower children to express their ideas through use of information & communication technology and different art processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language and cognitive skills (school-based) Social competence
Kings Langley Public School Kings Langley NSW 2147	Strong Start to school	Working with families and the community to ensure all students have an equitable and strong start to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical health and wellbeing Social competence Emotional maturity
Lansvale Public School Canley Vale NSW 2166	Lansvale Public School Supported Playgroup Early Intervention Program	Introduction of early intervention therapy program consisting of speech pathologist and occupational therapist.	All five domains

Name of school or service	Initiative title	Project focus	Domain focused on
Little Angels at Pagewood Green Eastgardens NSW 2036	Music Therapy	Incorporating music therapy program to support children's self-expression, sensory processing skills, communication and social skills, and mental health & wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social competence • Language and cognitive skills (school-based) • Communication skills and general knowledge
Rockdale Public School Rockdale NSW 2216	Ready, Set, Go! Program	Introducing a playgroup on school site with a play-based educational focus to support successful transition to school	All five domains
Salamander Child Care Centre Inc Salamander Bay NSW 2317	Onsite Occupational Therapist	Onsite occupational therapist working with children, families and centre staff to ensure appropriate early intervention strategies can be implemented promptly.	All five domains
St Joseph's Primary School Wauchope Wauchope NSW 2446	All children deserve to feel and be very well	Offering early intervention support for students with identified developmental vulnerabilities & improving processes for families and children in their transition to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health and wellbeing • Social competence • Emotional maturity • Language and cognitive skills (school-based)

Appendix 3: More information about the AEDC in NSW

Access [AEDC NSW micro professional learning](#) to learn more about:

- Why the AEDC data is important
- How the AEDC data is unique
- How the AEDC data is calculated and interpreted
- How the AEDC data information is reported

More information on this course can be accessed via this Quick Reference Code:



More information on the AEDC project in NSW is on the [AEDC NSW webpage](#):



To access the Australian Early Development Census data (AEDC) within NSW Department of Education please email aedc@det.nsw.edu.au.

