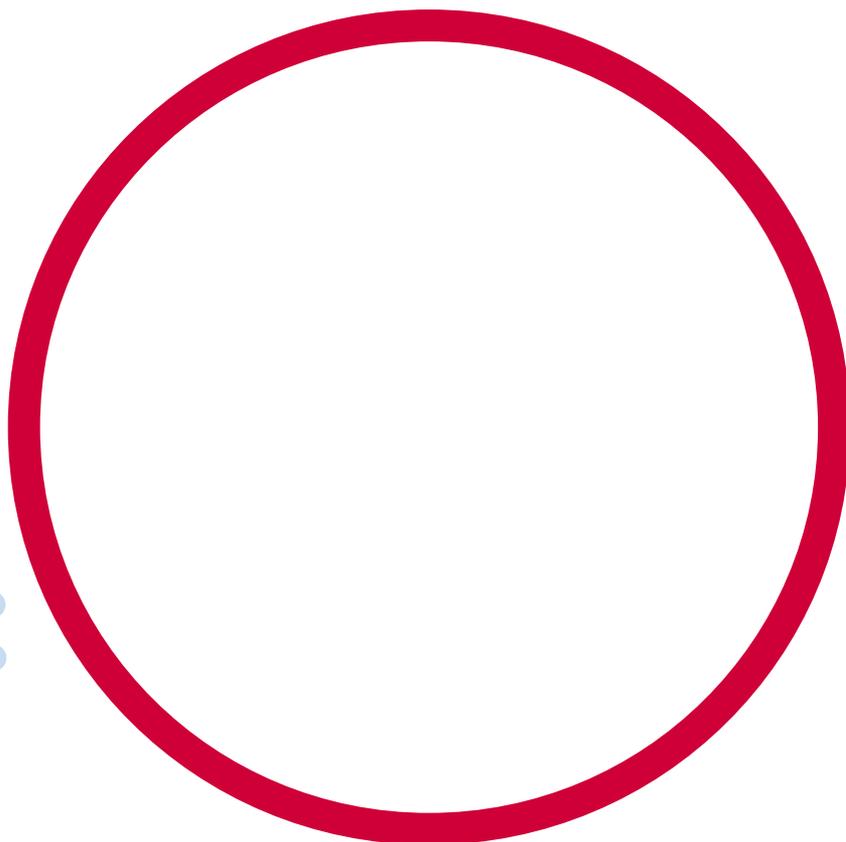
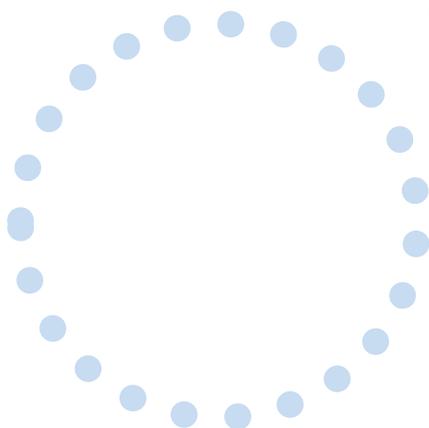
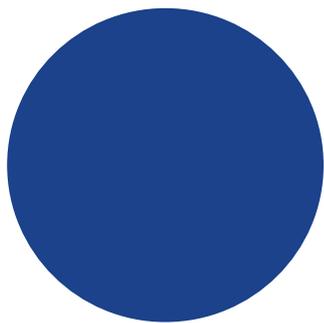

COVID Intensive Learning Support Program

Phase 1 evaluation report



Introduction

This Phase 1 evaluation report has provided the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program (COVID ILSP) team with valuable formative information about the reach of the program, how the program has been implemented in schools, and how schools have utilised the program for their unique contexts. The COVID ILSP team has incorporated and responded to the evaluation data as part of an iterative cycle of program developments and improvements. In this way, the Phase 1 report presents the preliminary findings of the process evaluation, focusing on the implementation of the program.

The COVID ILSP evaluation team was embedded in and reported to the COVID ILSP program as a CESE satellite team. A Senior Evaluator from CESE Evaluation and Effectiveness was the COVID ILSP evaluation lead in 2021.

The COVID ILSP evaluation team designed and carried out data collection relating to the activities and outputs of the COVID ILSP, and regularly provides the COVID ILSP team with data relating to the implementation, progress and impact of the program on both educators and students who have participated in this model of small-group tuition.

A Phase 2 evaluation report prepared by CESE was completed in June 2022. It provides insights into the implementation and challenges faced by the program in 2021.

In addition, a Phase 3 of the evaluation will be completed end of Term 1 2023. It will aim to understand the wider impact of the program on specific student cohorts and school contexts by focusing on the 2022 implementation of the program and capturing specific challenges experienced during that year. Phase 3 evaluation report will include a student outcome data analysis conducted by CESE and a qualitative analysis component to be delivered by an external provider working in partnership with CESE and COVID ILSP team.

Table of contents

Executive Summary	4
Implementation.....	4
Challenges	4
Helpfulness of resources	5
Impact on student learning and engagement.....	5
Summary.....	5
Background	6
Resources provided by the department	7
Evaluation Questions	7
Process evaluation questions	7
Outcome evaluation questions	7
Method	8
Phase 1 evaluation findings.....	8
Implementation of the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program.....	9
The perceived impact of specific tuition approaches on particular cohorts and contexts	18
Challenges encountered by schools, staff and students.....	20
The teaching and learning resources that were incorporated into practice and how helpful they were.....	24
The impact of the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program on the academic outcomes of samples of students who participated	28
The impact of the program on student engagement	29
Conclusions and implications	30

Executive Summary

The COVID Intensive Learning Support Program (ILSP) is a \$306 million investment for NSW public schools to deliver targeted, intensive small group tuition to students who were disadvantaged by the move to learning from home for seven weeks in 2020. Schools were informed that students most likely to benefit from small group tuition were those who were falling behind in their learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The evaluation focuses on the program within NSW public schools and examines how the program has been implemented, the impact of the program on student learning and engagement, challenges encountered by schools, and the helpfulness of teaching and learning resources that were developed for the program.

Phase 1 report findings are based on surveys (of principals/COVID ILSP coordinators, educators delivering tuition, classroom teachers), qualitative research (including field visits and case studies), data from School Workforce, and data from departmental reporting systems including PLAN2 (software for creating tuition groups and monitoring student strengths and areas for growth using the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions) and School Planning and Reporting Online (SPaRO).

Implementation

Over 7000 educators have been reported as delivering the program to over 180,000 students, mainly through withdrawal from class during school hours. Schools are providing tuition to their most disadvantaged students including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those who identify as Indigenous, and those with lower average Check-in assessment scores. Many schools have strong leadership teams who are strategically leveraging existing resources in their program design. Schools are using multiple sources of information to monitor student progress including classroom based and standardised assessments, teacher judgement, and observations. Many schools have expressed their intention to continue elements of the program into the future which suggests it is having positive impact.

Challenges

The main challenges for principals/coordinators involved staffing the program, finding physical space to deliver tuition, and finding physical space for additional staff. Challenges for educators and classroom teachers mainly involved finding time to collaborate. The challenge for schools around staffing could reflect existing teacher shortages in some parts of NSW. A decision to expand the pool of COVID ILSP educators by including School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs), third-party providers, and allied health professionals may have helped address this issue.

Helpfulness of resources

Resources provided to support the program included a dedicated COVID ILSP website, a suite of professional learning modules and associated resources, and a Microsoft TEAMS space for staff to collaborate and ask questions. School leaders reported that these resources have contributed towards staff upskilling in literacy and numeracy best practice, data skills, and knowledge of the learning progressions. Resources were considered to be helpful in the following ways:

- The website was particularly helpful for finding information on effective practice, available resources, and use of funds.
- The professional learning modules and associated resources were particularly helpful for using PLAN2 to create and manage tuition groups, resources supporting literacy interventions, and understanding what works best in small group tuition.
- The Microsoft TEAMS space was particularly helpful for engaging with professional learning and for staff to find answers to questions.

Impact on student learning and engagement

Qualitative data obtained through field visits, case studies, and open-ended survey questions suggests that the program is having a positive impact on student academic achievement. A number of teachers and school leaders noted that students were transferring skills to the classroom. Schools also reported that their students were highly engaged in the program, displaying improved confidence and self-esteem. Students are more willing to participate in class activities and appear to be more comfortable asking questions.

Summary

Overall, findings from the Phase 1 report indicate that benefits from the program appear to be extending well beyond its original aim of improving student learning. The positive impact on student engagement, upskilling of teachers, and a data-informed understanding of student learning needs, are highly valuable outcomes for the department as a whole. Elements of the program, such as an emphasis on evidence-based practice and the use of data to monitor progress are becoming embedded across many schools and will continue to benefit schools into the future.

Background

Due to COVID-19, NSW government schools encouraged students to undertake learning from home for seven weeks in 2020. Data from the department's Check-in assessments suggests that this move to remote/flexible learning, negatively impacted the learning progress of some students¹. In response, the NSW government announced a \$337 million program to deliver intensive small group tuition to approximately 290,000 students across all sectors. The program included \$306 million for all NSW public schools, including primary, secondary, central, and Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs). Each school's funding amount was based on the distribution of students in the lowest and second lowest quartiles of the Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI).

The purpose of the funding is for schools to employ 'educators' who will deliver small group tuition to students with the greatest learning needs especially in literacy and numeracy. Educators can be qualified teachers (including teachers who have retired, teachers on leave, casuals, temporary teachers, and full-time teachers), educational paraprofessionals, teacher education students in their final year, as well as university academics and postgraduate students. This was later expanded to include School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs) in March 2021, and allied health professionals in May 2021. Schools could use 10% of their funding for program planning, coordination, supervision and administration so many schools had a COVID ILSP coordinator, although this was not a requirement.

Schools were required to implement the program by Week 6 of Term 1. It was recommended that to maximise effectiveness small group tuition should:

- involve groups of 2-5 students
- involve sessions that are 20-50 minutes in duration
- occur at least 3 times per week over 10-20
- be targeted to students' specific needs

Schools could be flexible in their tuition approach according to what best suited their students' learning needs and school context. Schools were informed that students most likely to benefit from small group tuition were those who were falling behind in their learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Other students who could benefit included Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, those with a disability, those who had English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), students in out of home care and/or students who were disengaged from learning.

¹ The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) found that when 2020 Check-in assessment was compared with 2019 NAPLAN, students were generally performing in August – October 2020 at the same levels previously seen in May 2019 (with the exception of Year 3 numeracy). This indicates that on average students had fallen approximately 3-4 months behind in Year 3 reading, and 2-3 months behind in Year 5 reading and numeracy and Year 9 numeracy.

Resources provided by the department

In addition to the funding, the department provided the resources illustrated in Figure 1.

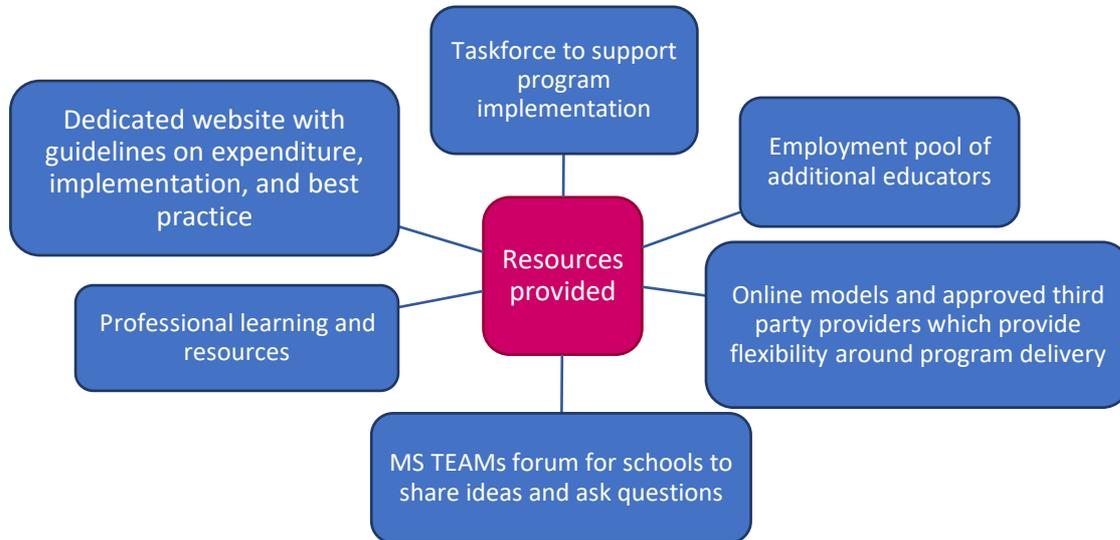


Figure 1. Resources provided by the department

Evaluation Questions

Process evaluation questions

- 1) How has the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program been implemented?
- 2) What was the perceived impact of specific tuition approaches on particular cohorts and contexts?
- 3) What challenges were encountered by schools, staff and students?
- 4) What teaching and learning resources were incorporated into practice and how helpful were they?

Outcome evaluation questions

- 1) Did the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program improve the academic outcomes of samples of students who participated?
- 2) What was the impact of the program on student engagement?

Method

Phase 1 report findings are based on:

- Anonymous surveys distributed in weeks 1-3 of Term 2, 2021 to all principals/coordinators, all staff employed to deliver the program (educators), and a sample of classroom teachers.
- An anonymous questionnaire distributed to 95 attendees at a network day for learning and support teachers.
- Qualitative research involving field visits to 18 schools (seven primary, eight secondary, two SSPs, one central school) in weeks 8-9 of Term 2. Field visits consisted of semi-structured interviews with school leaders and staff involved in the program, as well as observations of small group tuition where possible.
- Case studies of five schools that were highly engaged with the program. These schools frequently participated in MS TEAMS discussions or communicated with the taskforce and/or their Director Educational Leadership (DEL) about the program.
- Data from departmental reporting systems about students in the program. These systems include PLAN2 (software for creating tuition groups and monitoring student strengths and areas for growth using the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions) and School Planning and Reporting Online (SPaRO)
- Data from the Scout COVID ILSP dashboard about the number of staff delivering the program and their qualifications.
- Student Check-in assessment results from Term 2, 2021 for Years 4, 6 and 8.

Further information about the methods is in Appendix A.

Phase 1 evaluation findings

Surveys were distributed in early Term 2, approximately 5-6 weeks after schools were required to begin implementing small group tuition. As such, survey findings reflect views on early program implementation and challenges. Field visits occurred late in Term 2 when schools had established their programs and had probably completed at least one 10-week tuition cycle. Additional surveys and fieldwork are planned for Term 4, 2021, which will provide insight into perceived program impact.

Survey findings presented in this report are based on a sample of staff (e.g. principals who responded to a survey) that have been drawn from a larger population (e.g. all principals). This adds a degree of uncertainty to the findings. To illustrate this uncertainty, results include 95 per cent confidence intervals. Any value within the interval is plausible. Where sample sizes are small, or there is a large degree of variation in the data (e.g. people answered the question very differently), confidence intervals will be wide. This means that there is a large degree of uncertainty around those results and they should be interpreted cautiously.

Implementation of the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program

Key Findings

- 7559 staff employed – 74% are teachers.
- 186,083 students supported.
- Students receiving the program are predominantly disadvantaged students with lower Check-in assessment scores.
- Tuition is mainly delivered by withdrawal from class during school hours.
- Techniques used to identify students include teacher opinion/judgement, Check-in assessments, and observations.
- To select learning areas of focus, primary schools were more likely to use PLAN2 and secondary schools were more likely to use Scout.
- Schools are using an average of four sources of information to monitor student progress, including assessments, teacher judgement, and observations.

Over 7000 staff employed

As of 23rd September 2021, 7559 staff have been employed to deliver and/or coordinate the COVID ILSP. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of staff delivering the program are qualified teachers, followed by non-teacher educators (including teacher education students and university academics), School Learning Support Officers (SLSO), and educational paraprofessionals.

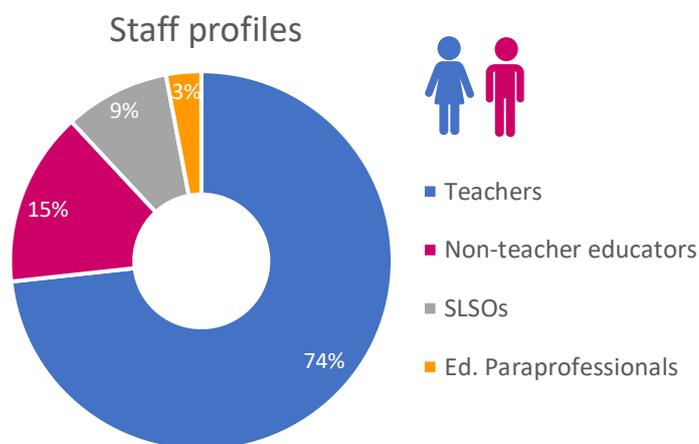


Figure 2. Staff employed

Survey findings from 773 principals/coordinators indicate that schools employed staff they were familiar with, particularly existing staff members (63%; 95% CI [59, 66] and known casuals (47%; 95% CI [43, 50]; see Figure 3).

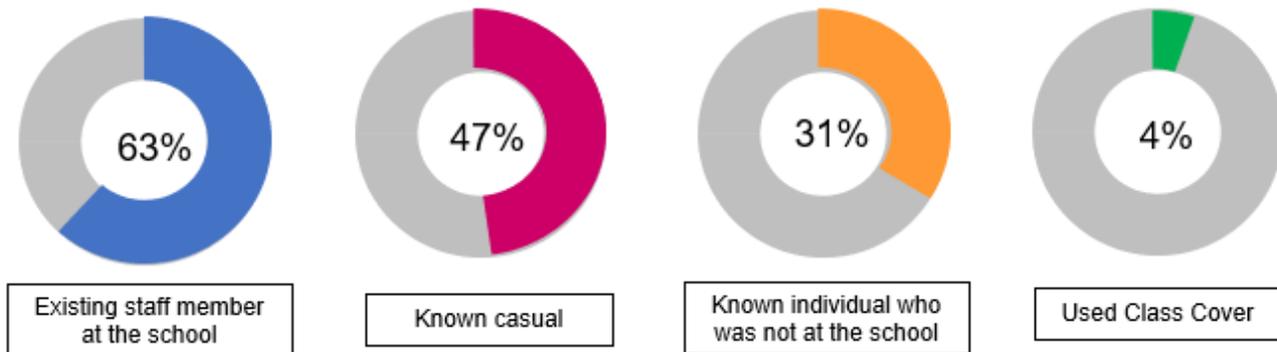


Figure 3. Ways that schools employed staff to deliver COVID ILSP

Over 180,000 students supported

Schools report the number of students in the program and tuition information via SPaRO or PLAN2. As of 23rd September 2021, 186,083 students have been supported by the COVID ILSP.²

School type and location. Based on the 111,148 students currently identified in PLAN2 as participating in the program, 73 per cent are from primary schools, 24 per cent are from secondary schools, two per cent are from central schools, and one per cent are from Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs).³ Data from PLAN2 also indicates that 62 per cent of students in the program are from schools in major cities, 28 per cent are from inner regional areas, nine per cent are from outer regional areas, and one per cent are from remote/very remote areas.⁴

Schools selected disadvantaged students consistent with recommendations

Analysis of students in the program focuses on COVID ILSP students recorded in PLAN2 that completed Term 2 Check-in assessment (i.e. Years 4, 6, and 8). We compare these students to the total number of students from the same cohort that completed Check-in. These percentages are likely to be underestimates because the COVID ILSP students do not include those reported in SPaRO.

Indigenous students. Of all students participating in the program, 15 per cent are Indigenous and 85 per cent are non-Indigenous. Table 1 indicates that of all the Indigenous students that completed Check-in, 19 per cent were selected to participate in the program. In contrast, of all the non-Indigenous students that completed Check-in, only

² Schools not using PLAN2 to identify students receiving the program, upload a spreadsheet with student information to SPaRO. The information in these spreadsheets is highly variable and needs to be manually collated. As such, only COVID ILSP students identified via PLAN2 are included in these descriptive statistics.

³ The distribution of school types of all NSW public schools is 73% primary schools, 18% secondary schools, 3% central schools, and 6% SSPs.

⁴ The distribution of school locations of all NSW public schools is 55% major cities, 26% inner regional, 16% outer regional, and 2% remote & very remote.

10 per cent were selected to participate in the program. This suggests that schools are appropriately selecting indigenous students for the program as these students are likely to have greater levels of need than non-indigenous students.

Table 1. Indigenous students participating in COVID ILSP

Indigenous	Non-COVID ILSP	COVID ILSP	Percentage of group selected	Percentage in COVID ILSP
No	136,155	14,624	10%	85%
Yes	10,338	2,488	19%	15%

Students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Of all students participating in the program, 21% are EAL/D students and 79% are non-EAL/D students. Table 2 indicates that of the 'Beginner' EAL/D students who completed Check-in, 15 per cent were selected to participate in the program. In contrast, only 11 per cent of non-EAL/D students were selected to participate. Again, schools are selecting students who are at early stages of learning English and are therefore likely to have greater need.

Table 2. EAL/D students participating in COVID ILSP

EAL/D	Non-COVID ILSP	COVID ILSP	Percentage of group selected	Percentage in COVID ILSP
Beginner EAL/D	1026	174	15%	1%
Emerging EAL/D	6196	897	13%	5%
Developing EAL/D	19,111	1668	8%	10%
Consolidating EAL/D	15,811	996	6%	6%
Non-EAL/D	107,427	13,641	11%	79%

Student socioeconomic advantage (SEA). Table 3 indicates that of all students who completed Check-in, 17 per cent of those selected for the program are from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic advantage (i.e. the most disadvantaged) compared to 4 per cent from the highest quartile. Again, schools are appropriately selecting their most disadvantaged students to participate in the program.

Table 3. Economic advantage of students participating in COVID ILSP

SEA Quartile	Non-COVID ILSP	COVID ILSP	Percentage of group selected	Percentage in COVID ILSP
0 - 25 th	31,922	6626	17%	39%
26 th - 50 th	35,112	5478	13%	32%
51 st - 75 th	38,468	3313	8%	19%
76 th - 100 th	40,092	1573	4%	9%

Check-in assessment data indicates the program is supporting students most in need

Term 2 Check-in assessment scores in reading and numeracy for students who are receiving the program are lower on average than Check-in assessment scores of students who are not receiving the program (see Table 4). This indicates that schools are selecting students with lower Check-in scores who may have fallen behind in their learning. In other words, schools are targeting appropriate students to participate in COVID ILSP. Histograms of Term 2 Check-in assessment scores for COVID ILSP and non-COVID ILSP students in Years 4, 6 and 8 are presented in Appendix B.

Table 4. Mean Check-in assessment scores for Term 2, 2021

Check-in Year Group	Reading		Numeracy	
	Non-COVID ILSP	COVID ILSP	Non-COVID ILSP	COVID ILSP
Year 4	455	392	459	405
Year 6	519	460	537	485
Year 8	545	502	552	502

Tuition is mainly delivered via withdrawal from class

The tuition mode of delivery was entered into PLAN2 for 61,641 students. This data indicates that schools are mainly delivering tuition through withdrawal from class (83%; 95% CI [83,84]; see Figure 4).

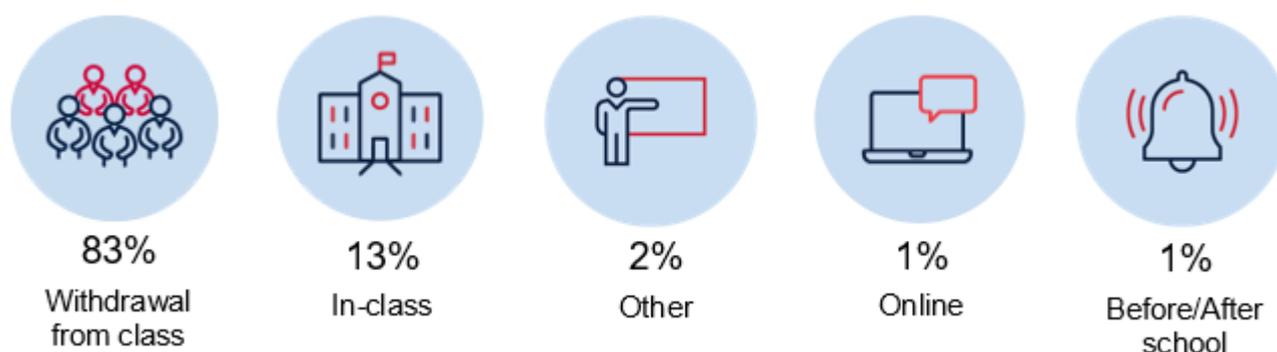


Figure 4. Tuition mode of delivery based on PLAN2 data

This is consistent with survey findings from 801 principals/coordinators where 89 per cent indicated that tuition was delivered through withdrawal from class during school hours (95% CI [87, 91]), followed by 47 per cent who implemented in-class tuition (95% CI [43, 50]), and 6 per cent who implemented before/after school tuition (95% CI [5, 8]).

Schools are leveraging existing support structures

Fieldwork findings indicate that when schools were planning their programs, many leveraged existing support structures by expanding or re-defining their learning and support models. Many schools scaled up practices that they had been trialling, such as flexibly grouping students based on their learning needs. Schools also leveraged staff expertise by harnessing subject-matter experts to deliver the program. Leveraging appears to have been particularly helpful for managing the rapid rate of program implementation.

Strong leadership teams are driving the program

Fieldwork indicates that many schools have a strong COVID ILSP leadership team that is driving the program in strategic ways. Dedicated leaders are thoughtfully planning program design, staffing, and timetabling. Leaders often had innovative ideas about how to portray the program, especially to reduce the negative perceptions traditionally associated with receiving additional learning support. School COVID ILSP leadership teams often included staff who had previous experience as Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Advisors (LaNSAs) or instructional leaders.

Multiple techniques were used to identify students

According to survey findings from principals/coordinators (n=762), schools used an average of four different techniques to identify students for the program. The main techniques used were teacher opinion/judgement (79%; 95% CI [76, 82]), Check-in assessments (70%; 95% CI [67, 74]), and observations (67%; 95% CI [64, 71]). These are similar to the techniques selected by educators (n=359) as shown in Figure 5.⁵ Although principals/coordinators may have had greater responsibility for identifying students, these similarities with educators suggest that there is consistency and agreement about the techniques that are being used. Figure 5 also indicates that principals/coordinators were more likely to select each technique than educators, which probably reflects their oversight and knowledge of student identification across the entire school.

⁵ The main techniques used by educators to identify students were: teacher opinion/judgement (73%; 95% CI [68, 77]), learning progressions data (57%; 95% CI [51, 62]), and observations (57%; 95% CI [52, 62]).

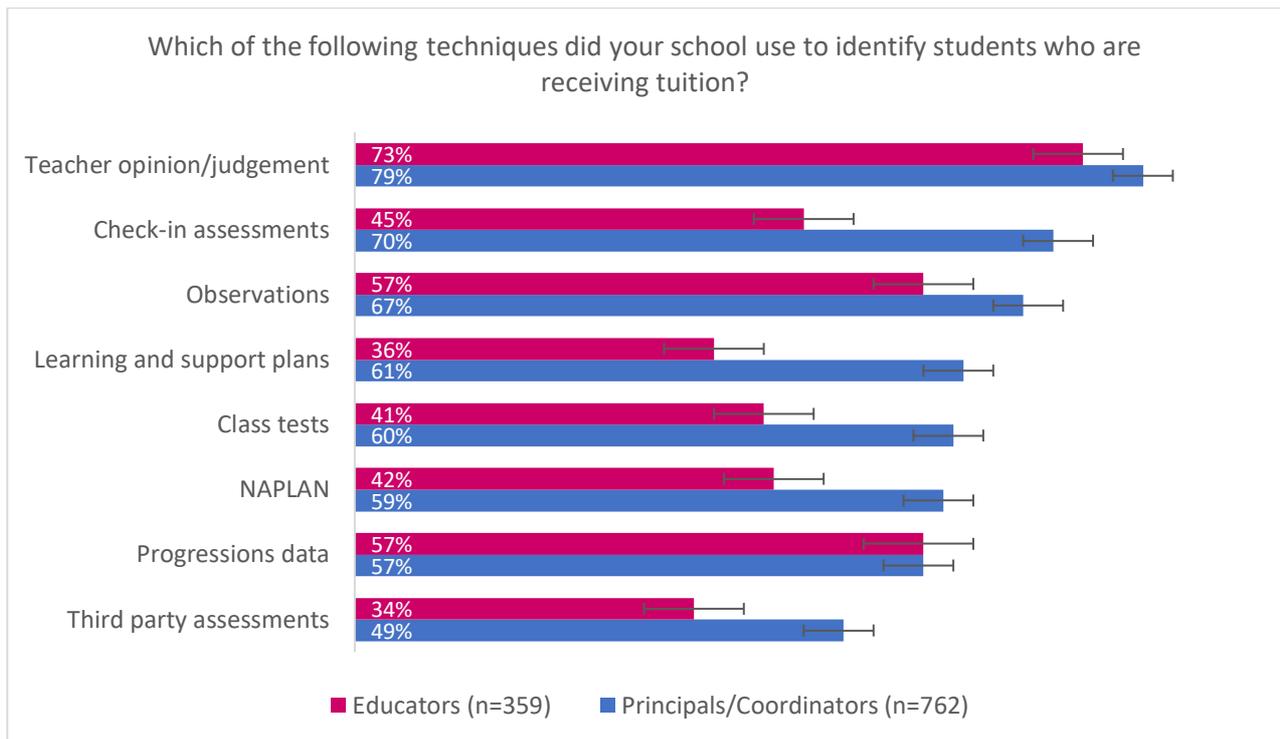


Figure 5. Techniques used to identify students

There were notable differences between primary and secondary schools in their use of some techniques. For example, primary schools were more likely to use the literacy and numeracy learning progressions (63%; 95% CI [59, 67]) than secondary schools (34%; 95% CI [26, 42]). Also, secondary schools were more likely to use NAPLAN (82%; 95% CI [74, 88]) than primary schools (55%; 95% CI [50, 59]). This most likely reflects existing differences between primary and secondary schools in the use of these resources.

Primary schools are more likely to use PLAN2 and secondary schools are more likely to use Scout

Principals/coordinators indicated in the survey whether they had used Scout and/or PLAN2 to help select learning areas of focus for small group tuition. As shown in Figure 6, secondary schools were more likely to use Scout (71%; 95% CI [63, 79]) than primary schools (46%; 95% CI [42, 50]). In contrast, primary schools were more likely to use PLAN2 63%; 95% CI [58, 66] than secondary schools (31%; 95% CI [23, 39]). This possibly reflects the fact that PLAN2 was introduced in primary schools two years before it was made available to secondary schools.

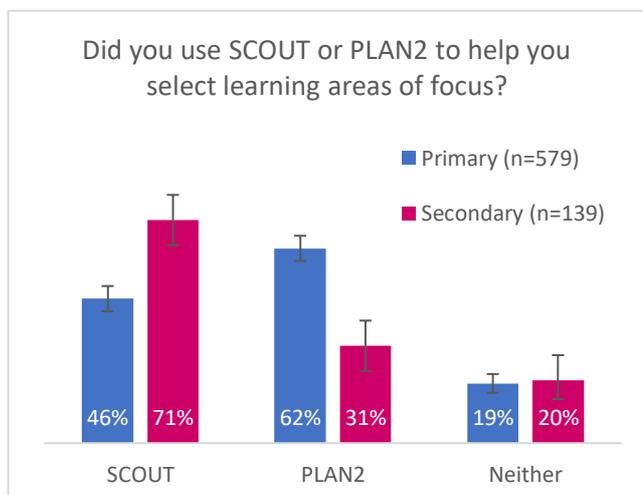


Figure 6. Use of Scout and PLAN2

Educators were asked in the survey whether they were going to create tuition groups in PLAN2 to monitor student progress and approximately half (49%; 95% CI [44, 54]) indicated that all of their tuition groups would be in PLAN2. Principals/coordinators were asked a similar question about whether the school was going to create tuition groups in PLAN2 and just over a third (36%; 95% CI [32, 39]) indicated that all of their tuition groups would be in PLAN2. This is not surprising as the principal/coordinator role may not necessarily involve creating tuition groups. Indeed, PLAN2 is intended mainly as a monitoring platform for teachers who are much more likely to use it than principals.

The most common reason for not using PLAN2 was that an alternative system was used (principals/coordinators 74%, educators 52%). Interestingly, principals were more likely to say that PLAN2 was too complicated (26%) and too time consuming (48%) than educators (5% and 11% respectively).⁶

The majority of educators and teachers who responded to the survey are collaborating

Based on survey findings, a high proportion of educators (96%; 95% CI [94, 98]) and classroom teachers (83%; 95% CI [77,89]) indicated that they collaborated with each other as shown in Figure 7. This is consistent with fieldwork findings which also indicated that staff are engaging in frequent, ongoing collaboration. Seventeen per cent of teachers indicated they had no collaboration compared to only 4 per cent of educators. However, educators are likely to be collaborating with multiple teachers which may help explain this finding.



Figure 7. Extent of collaboration between educators and classroom teachers

The focus of collaborative discussion between educators and classroom teachers involved student progress, student engagement, and student assessment data. Figure 8 presents these results according to educators (see Appendix C for results according to teachers).

⁶ Alternative system – 74% principals (95% CI [67,81]); 52% educators (95% CI [39, 65]);
 PLAN2 too complicated – 26% principals (95% CI [20, 34]); 5% educators (95% CI [1, 13]);
 PLAN2 too time consuming – 48% principals (95% CI [40, 55]; 11% educators (95% CI [5, 22]).

Fieldwork findings similarly indicated that staff are collaborating across multiple aspects of the program. Schools are utilising shared online spaces and documents and arranging regular staff meetings where educators share work samples and discuss student progress with teachers. This collaboration is likely to add value to the program by improving knowledge of students and assisting staff to align tuition content to classroom activities.

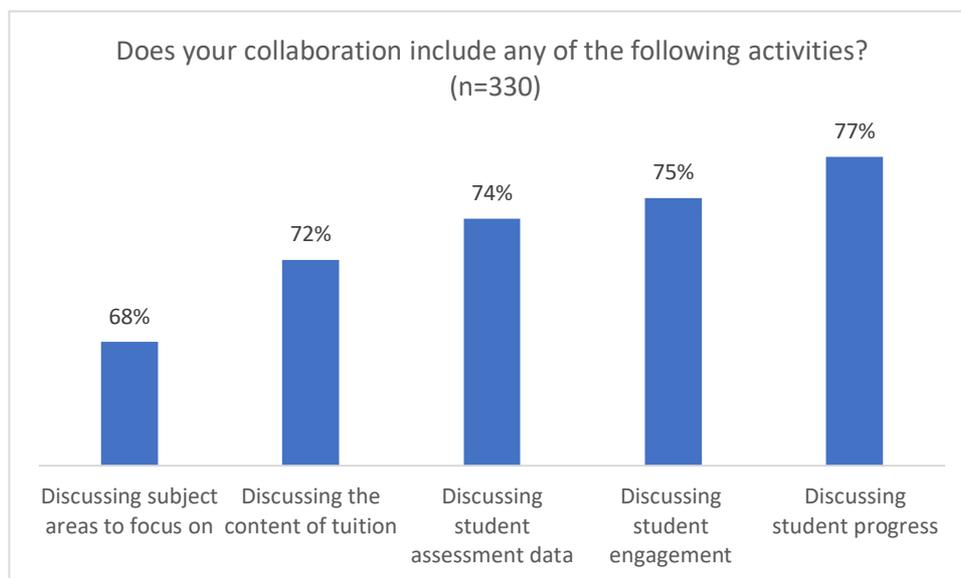


Figure 8. Focus of collaboration with teachers, according to educators

The majority of programs delivered focus on literacy

Thirty-four per cent of educators (95% CI [29, 40]) delivering tuition indicated in the survey that they were delivering specific programs (including departmental or third party/commercial programs). A large variety of programs were used, and the overwhelming majority were third party literacy programs. The most popular third party programs were from the MultiLit suite (MultiLit 11%; MiniLit 9%; MacqLit 9%) which aims to improve student literacy skills.

Multiple data sources are used to monitor progress

According to survey responses from principals/coordinators, schools used an average of four different data sources to monitor student progress. As shown in Figure 9, the most commonly used techniques were classroom based and standardised assessments, teacher judgements, and observations. Principals/ coordinators and educators selected the same top five techniques for monitoring progress. Once again, this indicates that there is agreement and consistency regarding the techniques that are being used.

Educators were somewhat less likely than principals/coordinators to state that class tests and Check-in assessments would be used but this may reflect the fact that they would probably not be administering those assessments themselves. Also, these assessments

are used at key times in the tuition cycle, especially to identify students for the program and to examine the program's impact.

Field visits also indicated that schools are using multiple data sources to monitor progress, including large scale assessments (e.g., Check-in assessment), class tests, and learning progressions data. Schools are also examining data at multiple levels such as within tuition groups, within classrooms, and across cohorts. This use of data will have ongoing benefits and influence the way schools gauge the impact of programs beyond COVID ILSP and inform their next steps.

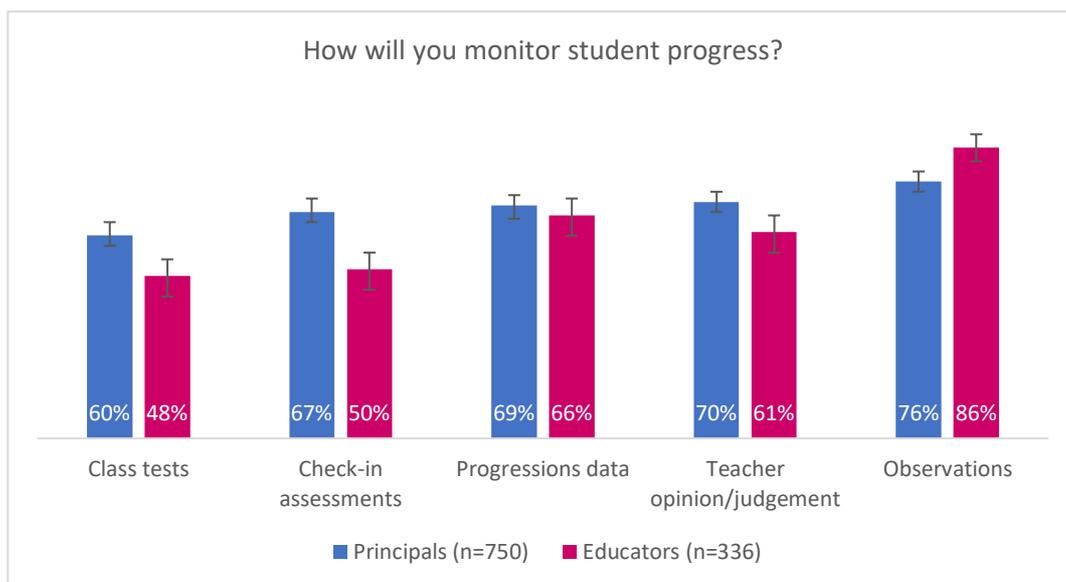


Figure 9. Techniques to monitor student progress

There is shared responsibility for the program in schools

Field visits indicated that there is shared responsibility for the program across all staff in schools. One consequence of this, is that teachers are developing a deeper understanding of student learning needs based on shared assessment data. Staff are shifting the dialogue from “my students in my class”, to “our students in our school”. Schools are also embedding elements of the program across the entire school. For instance, some schools are using COVID ILSP to emphasise the importance of evidence-based practice. Others are using the program to have more robust conversations around student learning and to promote a growth mindset.

Schools are planning to continue elements of the program into the future

During field visits, the vast majority of schools indicated that they planned to continue the program into the future, especially the elements that they found to be most effective. This future planning highlights the favourable perceptions about the impact of the program and suggests it may have a lasting influence on schools.

The perceived impact of specific tuition approaches on particular cohorts and contexts⁷

Key Findings

- At one SSP, students with additional learning needs have challenged the assumptions of staff who now realise that they can have higher expectations of their students.
- One case study school found that 39% of Year 9 students who received tuition, increased their numeracy achievement by at least one NAPLAN band.
- One case study school found that Year 3 students who received tuition in phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, and fluency made 1-2 years of progress in 6 months.

The examples below are from field visits and case studies and illustrate the impact of the COVID ILSP on particular cohorts and contexts. The data and analyses were reported by each school and represent their interpretation of the impact of the program.

High expectations for students at a School for Specific Purposes

During field visits, one School for Specific Purposes (SSP) that focused on literacy skills in their COVID ILSP reported using Check-in assessment for the first time in order to inform their program. Staff were surprised that all of the students who took the assessment, managed the exam quite well. Student participation and performance in this assessment challenged the assumptions of some staff who realised that they can have high expectations of their students. School leaders built upon this to push the boundaries around their COVID ILSP and challenge perceptions about student abilities.

Staff at the school are recognising the need to assess student progress in highly innovative ways, using a variety of resources. For example, students with limited speech can show their understanding using objects in the environment. During an assessment, one student left her desk to find her bag to illustrate an example of a 'backpack'. Similarly, to illustrate her understanding of the word 'fish', she found a symbol of a fish from a game in the classroom. By trialling different assessments for COVID ILSP, teachers have identified the need to change their practices and measure progress in innovative ways.

⁷ Further examples about the impact of the program in schools can be found on the 'School Stories' page of the COVID ILSP website - <https://education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/covid-intensive-learning-support-program/school-stories>

Year 9 numeracy tuition at Warrawong High School

At Warrawong High School, numeracy tuition was delivered to 28 Year 9 students with a focus on 'problem solving' and 'communicating'. Students received tuition through withdrawal from class, in three 50 minute lessons per week. Progression criteria for the two focus skills were established so that students could self-reflect, establish learning goals, and monitor their own progress. In each tuition session, students were exposed to a range of challenging problems (i.e. band 9 and 10 NAPLAN type questions) and were encouraged to break down the problem and communicate their approach to the rest of the group ('number talk'). Verbal feedback was provided to students throughout each session.

The school evaluated their program by collecting a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. According to their calculations, 39 per cent of students increased at least one NAPLAN band in numeracy. They also calculated a 15 per cent increase in the number of students in the top two numeracy bands. Additionally, 75 per cent of students in the program said it was 'very effective' at improving their ownership of learning.

Year 3 literacy tuition at Mittagong Public School

At Mittagong Public School, Year 3 students who are participating in the COVID ILSP are completing MultiLit through withdrawal from class. The school used multiple data sources such as the Phonological Awareness Assessment, Phonics Screening Check, and ongoing teacher assessments to identify students who would benefit from explicit instruction in phonics and phonological awareness. The school had trialled MultiLit in 2020 with a small group of students and found that this program suited their context and student needs. The COVID ILSP funding allowed them to deliver this program on a larger scale. Staff use the Areas of Focus tool in PLAN2 to identify short term goals for students and literacy progression indicators. Those who graduate from the program enter a 'transition' phase where they consolidate their new skills in phonics and reading fluency, whilst improving comprehension and broadening their vocabulary.

Student progress in fluency (word count per minute) and decoding is monitored through assessments every 5 weeks. Assessment data examining student performance in February and June 2021, indicated that students had made substantial improvements. For fluency, the school reported an effect size of 0.63, which they interpreted as more than one year's growth in less than six months⁸. Similarly, for decoding, the effect size was 1.82, which they interpreted as over two year's growth in less than six months.

⁸ Based on Hattie's (2009) Visible Learning Effect Size tool (VL-ES).

Challenges encountered by schools, staff and students⁹

Key Findings

- Challenges for principals/coordinators involve staffing the program, finding physical space to deliver tuition, and finding space for additional staff.
- Challenges for educators involve finding time to collaborate with teachers and delivering content in the time available.
- Challenges for teachers involve finding time to collaborate with educators.

The main challenges for principals/coordinators involved staffing the program and finding extra physical space

Challenges around staffing were anecdotally reported as a challenge early in the program, so the principal/coordinator survey specifically addressed this issue. As shown in Figure 10, of those who indicated in the survey that they used the employment pool in Class Cover, two thirds (66%; 95% CI [60, 73]) said they found this to be “somewhat” or “extremely” difficult. Additionally, finding staff to deliver the program was also rated as “somewhat” or “extremely” difficult by 40% (95% CI [37, 44]) of surveyed principals/coordinators. In contrast, schools did not tend to have difficulty finding a COVID ILSP coordinator with only 11% (95% CI [9, 14]) rating this as “somewhat” or “extremely” difficult. Schools may have had less difficulty finding a coordinator if they appointed someone known to the school, who had demonstrated their ability to meet the requirements of the role.

⁹ Student voice will be captured in Term 4 surveys and focus groups so challenges facing students are not reported in these Phase 1 evaluation findings.

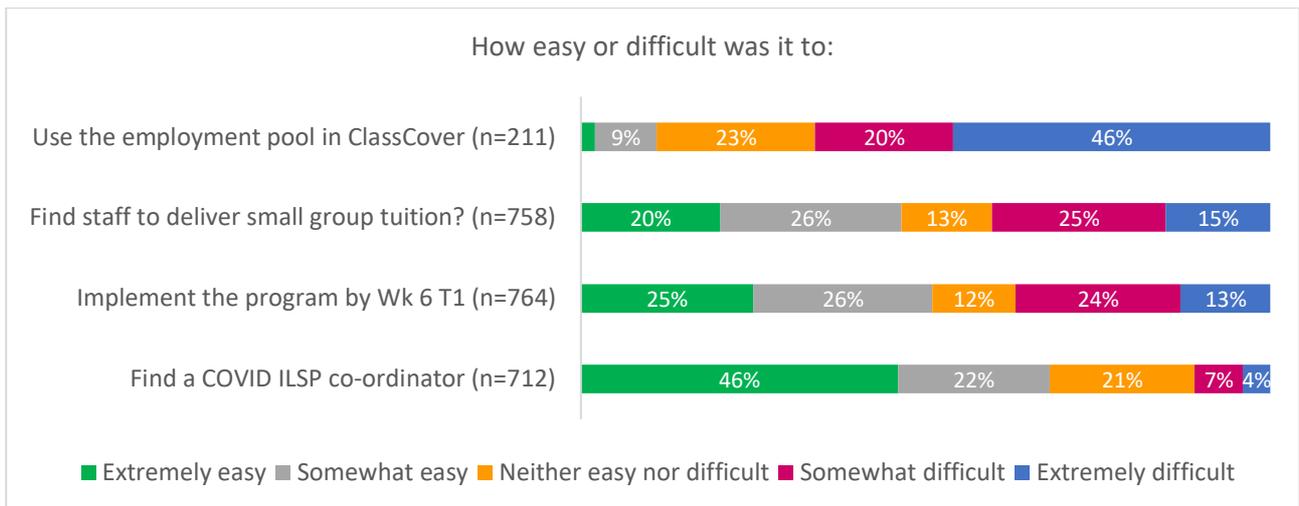


Figure 10. Staffing challenges for principals/coordinators

The challenge around finding staff to deliver the program may reflect the broader teaching staff shortage in some parts of NSW. Allowing SLSOs, teacher education students, university academics, retired teachers, and allied health professionals to deliver the program attempted to address this issue by creating an additional source of educators. This could be enhanced further by working closely with universities to establish partnerships that could lead to more teacher education students delivering tuition. One school noted that their teacher education students, who were delivering the program, were gaining valuable exposure to explicit teaching, collaborating with experienced teachers, finding mentors, and becoming more familiar with what works best when delivering small group tuition.

An additional survey question examined other challenges that may have been faced by principals/coordinators. As shown in Figure 11, these challenges involved finding physical space to deliver small group tuition (53% found this at least moderately challenging; 95% CI [49, 57]) and finding physical space for additional staff (48% found this at least moderately challenging; 95% CI [44, 52]).

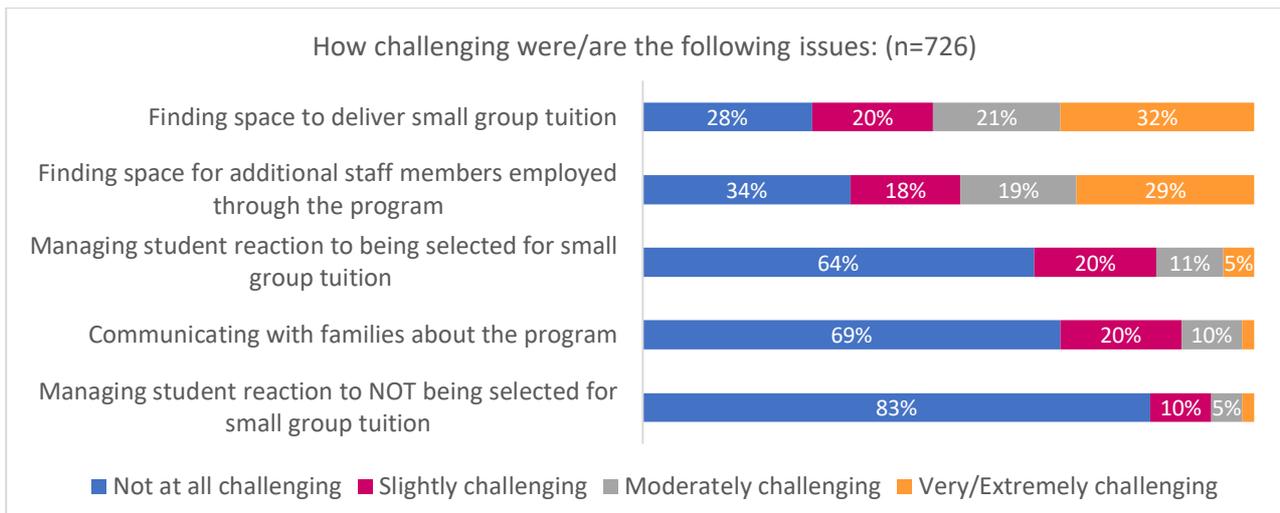


Figure 11. Additional challenges for principals/coordinators

Other challenges reported in field visits and open-ended survey comments included:

Administrative burden. Some schools indicated that implementing the program had created an administrative burden. Schools noted that the program had increased their workload in early Term 1, which is typically a very busy time for schools.

Timetabling. Students often did not want to be withdrawn from certain classes and in some cases, teachers did not want their students withdrawn. Some schools adjusted timetables to ensure students would not miss the same classes repeatedly or miss any assessments.

Rapid implementation of the program. Schools felt they did not have sufficient time to prepare for program delivery. They also noted that information was released in a staggered way which made it challenging to stay up to date with program requirements and guidelines.

Employing SLSOs. Initially, schools were not able to engage SLSOs to deliver the program. However, guidelines were updated early in the program so that in exceptional circumstances schools could employ an experienced SLSO working under the supervision and direction of a teacher. A number of schools reported that this had disrupted their plans and created confusion around staffing the program.

The main challenge for educators involved finding time to collaborate with teachers

According to educators who responded to the survey, their main challenges involve finding time to collaborate with classroom teachers (68% found this at least moderately challenging; 95% CI [62, 72]) and delivering content in the time available (61% found this at least moderately challenging; 95% CI [55, 66]; see Figure 12). Responses to an open-ended survey question asking for any additional feedback about the program, also indicated that the rapid program roll-out meant that professional learning and resources

were not available as early as some educators would have liked. Staffing issues were less challenging for educators which is not surprising as this is not likely to have been their responsibility.

One way to address some of these challenges, could be to establish a community of practice where ideas to enhance collaboration time can be shared. Some schools noted the benefits of shared online spaces and messaging applications, and some have timetabled sessions each week for teachers and educators to collaborate and discuss student progress.

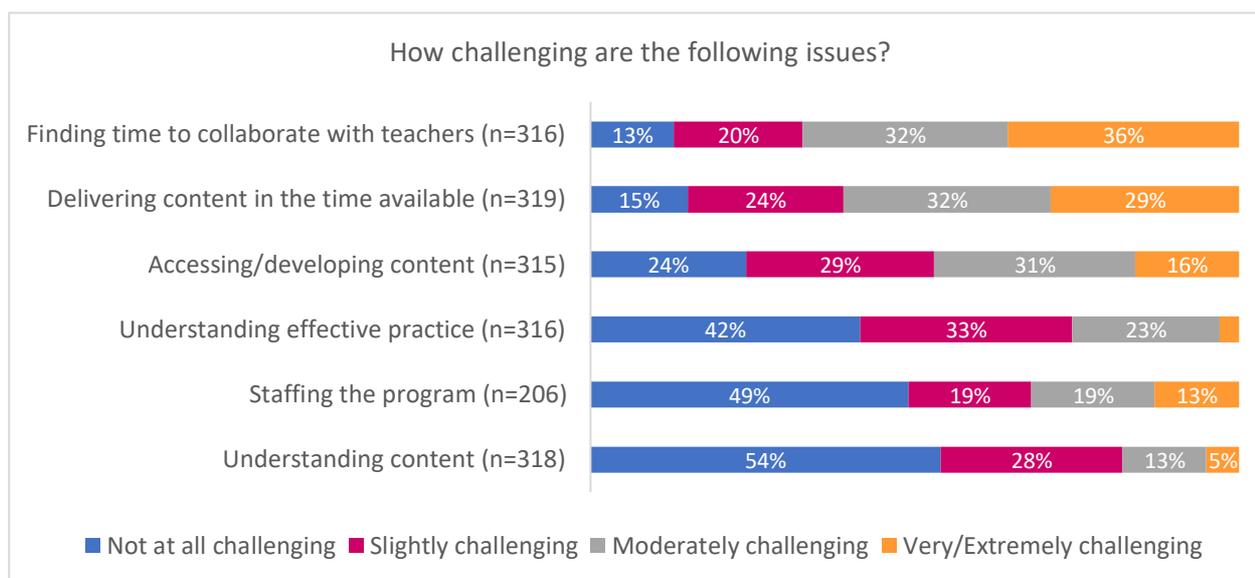


Figure 12. Challenges for educators

The main challenge for classroom teachers involved finding time to collaborate with educators

According to classroom teachers who responded to the survey, their main challenge involved finding time to collaborate with staff delivering tuition (59% found this at least moderately challenging; 95% CI [51, 67]; see Figure 13). This aligns with the main challenge reported by educators. There were also some minor challenges for teachers around communicating with families about the program and managing the reaction of students who were selected to participate in the program.

Another challenge raised by teachers in an open-ended survey question involved disruptions associated with students being withdrawn from their classes. Teachers are concerned that students are missing important work and they are having to repeat parts of their lessons to cater for students who have missed classes. Although most schools are withdrawing students from class for tuition, there may be some benefit in the department highlighting ways in which small group tuition can be better aligned with class work.

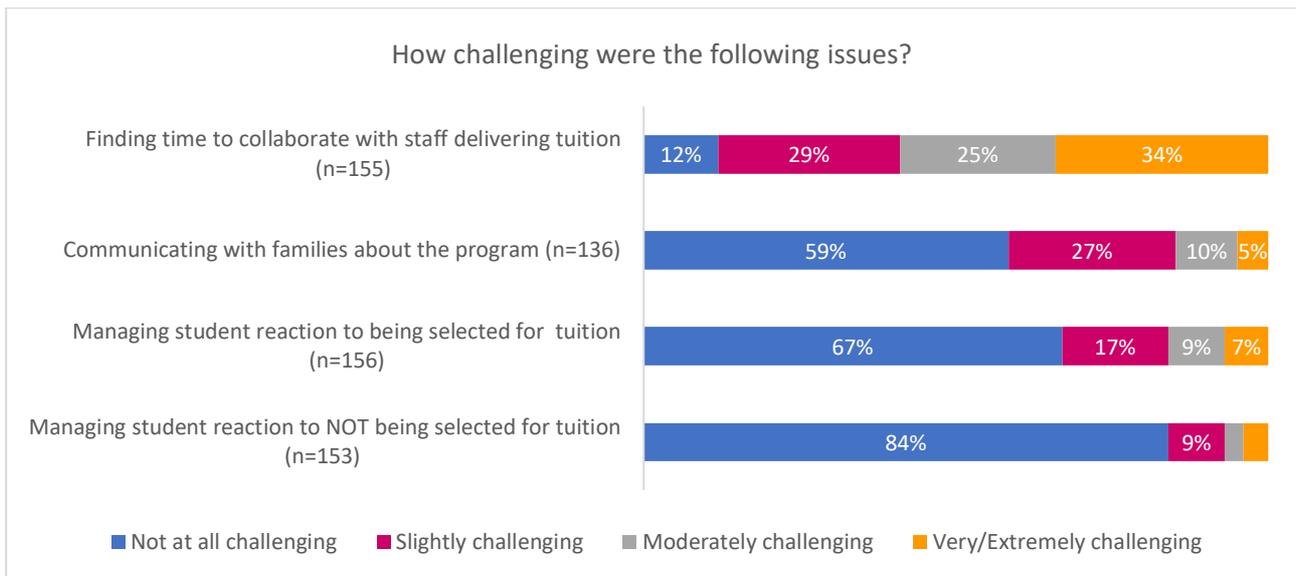


Figure 13. Challenges for classroom teachers

The teaching and learning resources that were incorporated into practice and how helpful they were

Key Findings

- The COVID ILSP website was helpful for information on effective practice, available resources, information on student identification and progress monitoring, reporting requirements, and use of funds.
- The professional learning that was most helpful included the use of PLAN2 to create and manage tuition groups, resources supporting literacy interventions and understanding what works best in small group tuition.
- The Microsoft TEAMS space was most helpful for engaging with professional learning and finding answers to questions.

The majority of information on the website was helpful

A dedicated COVID ILSP website provided information on program guidelines, staffing, reporting requirements, and elements of best practice. The website was regularly updated with new resources and program-specific professional learning. Survey results indicate that the website was used by 94 per cent (95% CI [92, 96]) of principals/coordinators and 85 per cent (95% CI [81, 88]) of educators. In contrast, the website was used by only 21 per cent (95% CI [15, 28]) of classroom teachers which is not surprising given that teachers are not necessarily involved in delivery of the program.

In terms of the helpfulness of information on the website, principals/coordinators, educators, and classroom teachers who responded to the survey, rated most of the

information as moderately or very/extremely helpful. Ratings were similar across the three groups of survey respondents and the proportion who rated the information as at least moderately helpful is shown in Table 5 (for detailed results see Appendix C).

Information on staff recruitment was rated slightly less helpful than other types of information, despite this being a major challenge for principals/coordinators. Guidelines around the use of SLSOs and third party tuition providers were changed early in the program (due to high demand), which may account for this finding.

Table 5. Survey respondents who rated the website information at least moderately helpful

Website information	Principals/ Coordinators	Educators	Teachers
Available resources/PL	87%	85%	81%
How to identify students	81%	80%	84%
How to monitor student progress	80%	82%	90%
Effective practice	88%	88%	90%
Reporting requirements	81%	77%	90%
Use of funds	87%	N/A	N/A
Staff recruitment	65%	N/A	N/A
Applying for employment	N/A	74%	N/A

Staff were highly satisfied with the helpfulness of the program’s professional learning

When the surveys were distributed in Term 2, Weeks 1-3, a number of professional learning modules and associated resources had been specifically developed for COVID ILSP principals/coordinators and educators. These focused on best practice, student identification and progress monitoring, and supporting students with additional learning needs. Survey respondents indicated how helpful these resources had been, and the figures presented here illustrate ratings made by educators. These were similar to ratings made by principals/coordinators, which can be found in Appendix C.

For resources focusing on best practice, each resource was rated as moderately or very/extremely helpful by over 80% of educators (see Figure 14). The resources rated as most helpful were those supporting literacy interventions and understanding what works best in small group tuition.

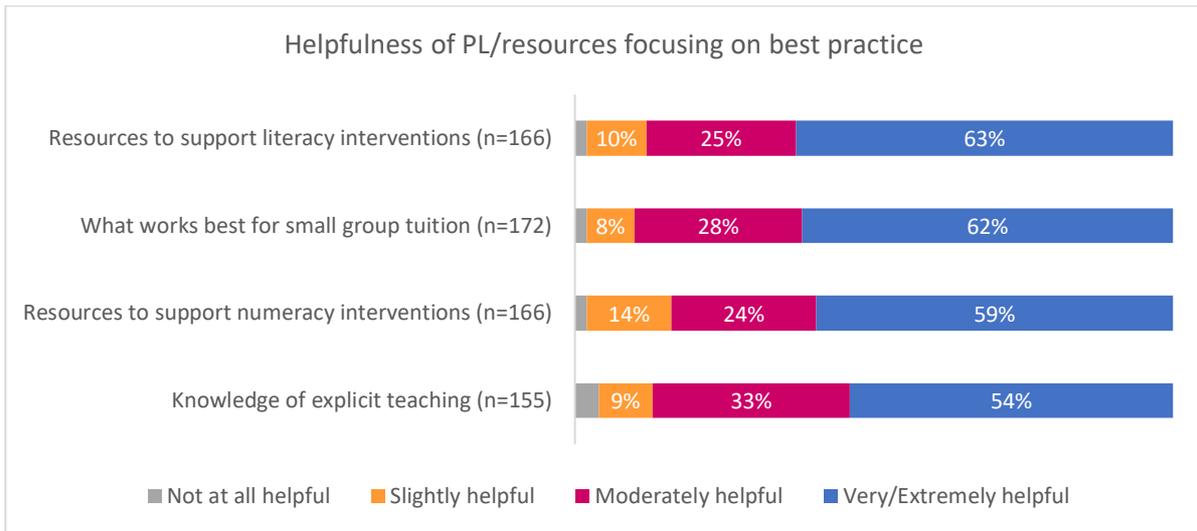


Figure 14. Helpfulness of professional learning focusing on best practice

For resources focusing on identifying students and monitoring progress, two thirds of educators (95% CI [60, 74]) thought that the support for using PLAN2 to create and manage tuition groups had been very/extremely helpful (see Figure 15). Internal school evaluation received slightly lower helpfulness ratings which is not unexpected, as initial resources and guidelines predominantly focused on program implementation rather than evaluation.

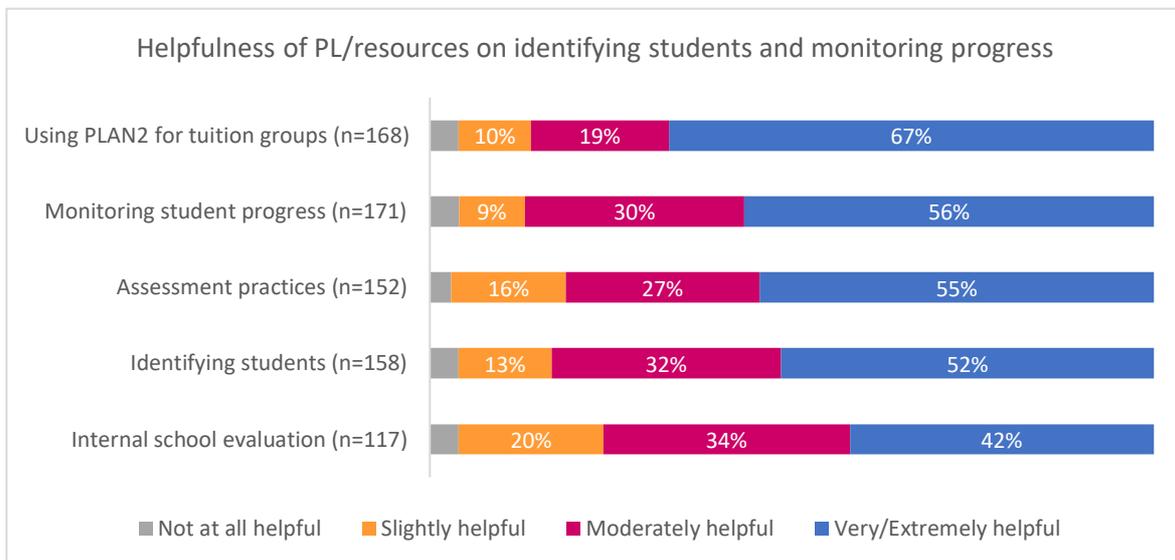


Figure 15. Helpfulness of professional learning focusing on identifying students and monitoring progress

For resources focusing on supporting students with additional learning needs, each resource was rated moderately or very/extremely helpful by over 80% of educators (see Figure 16). It is worth noting that professional learning modules in this area had only been available for approximately one week when the survey was distributed.

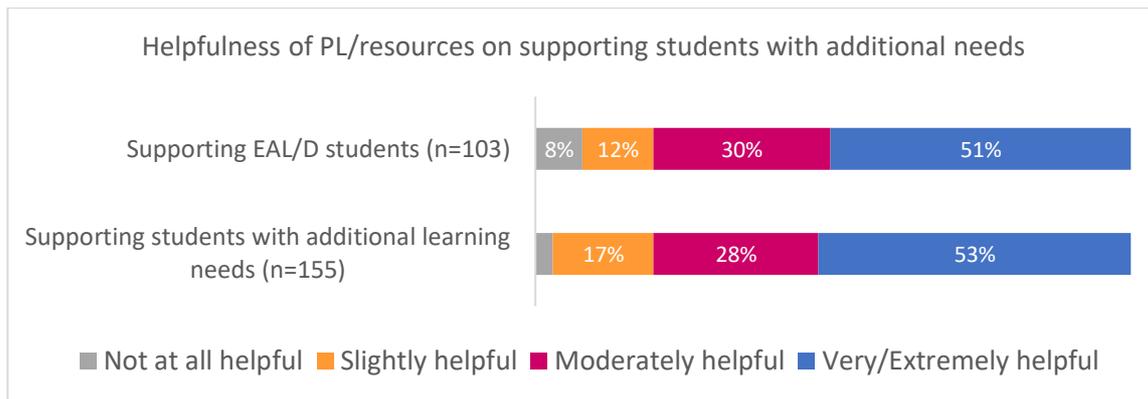


Figure 16. Helpfulness of professional learning focusing on supporting students with additional needs

Fieldwork indicated that staff are highly satisfied with the professional learning that was developed for the COVID ILSP. Many schools reported that staff across the entire school, including those not involved in program delivery, are completing the COVID ILSP professional learning. Consequently, school leaders feel that staff are upskilling in literacy and numeracy, the learning progressions, PLAN2, and data use/skills.

The overall level of satisfaction around the helpfulness of professional learning illustrates the value of developing program-specific professional learning that focuses on best-practice. Notably, the development of professional learning drew upon expertise from both within and outside of the department and included a cutting edge “expert” series, delivered by academics and leaders in the field.

The Microsoft TEAMS space was most helpful for engaging with professional learning

Microsoft TEAMS spaces were established with separate channels for principals/coordinators and educators delivering tuition. Staff were encouraged to use the TEAMS space to collaborate, exchange ideas, ask questions and access professional learning. The TEAMS space also provided the opportunity for staff to attend “Coffee catch-ups” which involved 30 min information sessions on relevant topics.

Survey respondents were asked how they used the TEAMS space and how helpful they found it. Both principals/coordinators and educators were mainly using TEAMS to engage with the professional learning and find answers to their questions. Figure 17 illustrates the helpfulness ratings made by educators, which were very similar to the ratings made by principals/coordinators (for more detailed responses, see Appendix C).

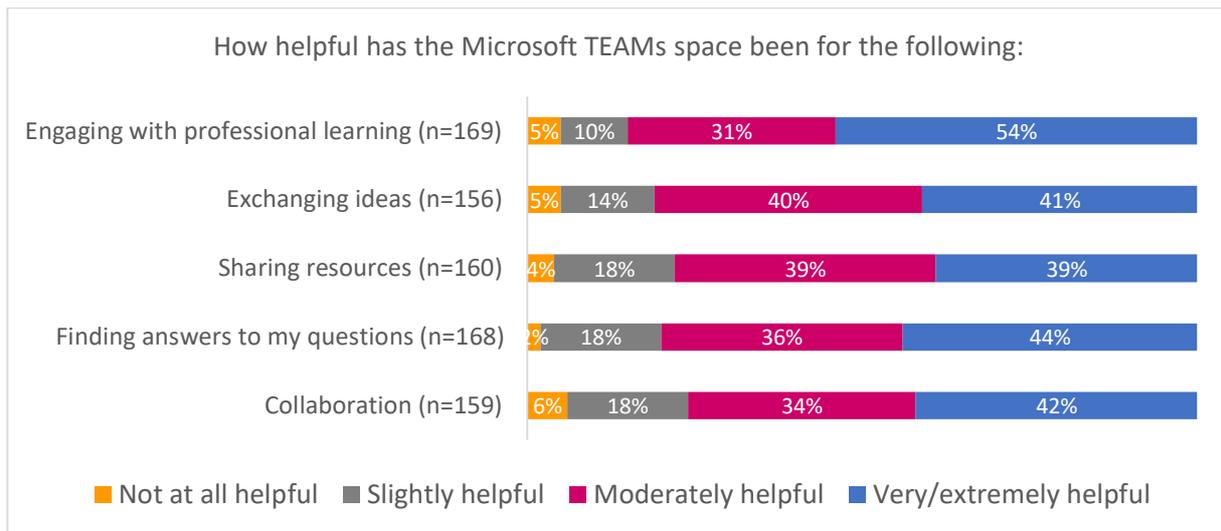


Figure 17. Helpfulness of the MS TEAMS space

The impact of the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program on the academic outcomes of samples of students who participated

Term 4 Check-in assessments will be the main indicator of whether the program has improved the academic outcomes of students who participated. At the time of writing, these assessments had not occurred and results are therefore not included in this report. The final evaluation report will compare the Check-in assessment performance of COVID ILSP students and matched comparison students.

Key Findings

- Qualitative data from field visits, case studies, and open-ended survey questions suggest that the program is having a positive impact on student academic achievement.
- Teachers have reported that students are transferring tuition skills to the classroom.

Qualitative data suggests the program is improving academic achievement

Qualitative data obtained through field visits, case studies, and open-ended survey questions suggest that the program appears to be having a positive impact on student academic achievement. During field visits, a number of teachers and school leaders reported that students were transferring skills to the classroom. Additionally, feedback obtained from a questionnaire delivered at a network day for learning and support teachers, also suggests that the program is having a positive impact on student learning.

These teachers were asked an open-ended question about what impact they thought COVID ILSP was having on student engagement, attendance, and learning. One of the major themes that emerged was the positive impact of the program on student learning. Comments made by these teachers include:

- “COVID ILSP has already seen growth in reading levels, student attendance and students love having small group tuition at a pace and level specifically catering to their needs.”
- “Increased reading ability, fluency, decoding and phonological awareness.”
- “Increasing literacy and numeracy skills.”
- “Improved writing skills.”
- “Improved academic success.”
- “Students are improving in comprehension skills and confidence.”
- “Positive, seeing growth in academic results.”

These findings will be examined alongside Term 4 Check-in assessment results when available, to provide a more complete picture of the impact of the program on student academic achievement.

The impact of the program on student engagement

Key Findings

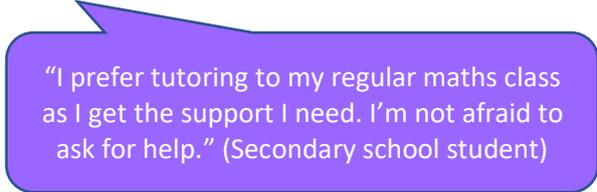
- Staff have reported an increase in student engagement, confidence, and self-esteem.
- Students appear to be establishing strong positive relationships with staff delivering tuition.
- Students appear more willing to participate in class activities and seem more comfortable asking questions.

Student engagement and confidence have increased

During field visits, staff reported that student engagement had increased substantially as a result of the program. There had been a noticeable increase in student confidence and self-esteem. Students were more willing to participate in class activities and appeared to be more comfortable asking questions. Some students indicated that they felt less daunted when taking a test. Staff also observed that students were establishing strong positive relationships with educators who were

“I’m more confident in talking to people... it also helps me write better because reading gives you ideas about what to write, especially for imaginative texts.” (Secondary school student)

delivering tuition. Many schools celebrated student success in the program across the entire school (e.g. at school assemblies), which may also be boosting student confidence.



“I prefer tutoring to my regular maths class as I get the support I need. I’m not afraid to ask for help.” (Secondary school student)

Feedback from learning and support teachers also highlighted the impact of the program on student engagement. These teachers made comments such as:

- “Students are enjoying the focus sessions and, are as a result, more motivated to learn and succeed.”
- “Students look forward to their session, good relationships forming, increased confidence.”
- “Negative behaviours have reduced as students are able to understand and complete tasks due to explicit teaching and constant feedback.”
- “Students are more attentive and happy.”

Conclusions and implications

The COVID ILSP has been well received by schools who are highly positive about their ability to provide intensive, targeted support to students who are most in need. In addition to providing an economic stimulus and employment for over 7000 educators, the program has already supported over 180,000 students. Schools are providing tuition to their most disadvantaged and vulnerable students including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those who identify as Indigenous, and those with lower average Check-in assessment scores.

Feedback from schools suggests that the program appears to be having a positive impact on student learning and that students are transferring skills to the classroom. Schools also report that their students are highly engaged in the program, improving in confidence, and establishing positive relationships with others.

Phase 1 evaluation findings highlight seven key learnings that are relevant to both COVID ILSP and other departmental programs and initiatives:

- 1) Schools highlighted many advantages of being able to leverage existing support structures and staff expertise when designing their programs. If future departmental programs can support schools to do this, it will be highly beneficial.
- 2) Rapid program implementation has been challenging for schools, especially the need to find additional staff in a short amount of time. However, these challenges can be alleviated by providing schools with clear, consistent guidelines and increased options around staffing.

-
- 3) Professional learning based around what works best can be used beyond the program to enhance teacher knowledge of literacy and numeracy, the learning progressions, PLAN2, and data skills.
 - 4) A dedicated COVID ILSP website has been helpful as it provides a single source of information for the program that is updated regularly.
 - 5) A dedicated Microsoft TEAMS space for collaboration and exchanging ideas has been well received in a time of transition to on-line spaces and resources.
 - 6) Elements of the program, such as an emphasis on evidence-based practice and the use of data to monitor progress are becoming embedded across schools and will continue to add value beyond the end program.
 - 7) Schools that share responsibility for the program across the entire school are reporting positive shifts in school learning culture.

Overall, findings from this Phase 1 evaluation report indicate that benefits from the program appear to be extending well beyond its original aim of improving student learning. The positive impact on student engagement, upskilling of teachers, and a data-informed understanding of student learning needs, are highly valuable outcomes for the department as a whole. Schools have expressed their intention to continue elements of the program into the future which suggests it is having a positive impact and has the potential to provide ongoing benefits.