



## Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes in public education:

Our collective approach to building strong system foundations



Government of South Australia

Department for Education



# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal peoples as the First Educators and the First Learners of this land. For generations, Aboriginal peoples have cared for Country, nurtured children, and shared wisdom, stories, and culture - teaching our children how to learn, belong, and thrive. The enduring knowledge and leadership continues to guide and strengthen our education system today.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders past and present, and recognise the tireless contributions of families, communities, and educators who continue this legacy.

We also acknowledge and thank our non-Aboriginal colleagues who work alongside Aboriginal people, learning, supporting, and teaching in partnership to create culturally responsive, respectful, and inclusive learning environments for all children and young people.

In every learning space, we commit to honouring culture, valuing knowledge, and walking together to ensure every child can thrive.

## Language

Throughout this document the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This term is preferred by Aboriginal South Australians and the department.

## Applicability

This document is designed to be applicable to every site, service and office in the public education system in South Australia.

The department acknowledges the unique governance arrangements for education on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY), Yalata and Maralinga Tjarutja Lands and respects the partnership with and role of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC) in ensuring Anangu students are strong and confident in their spirit with culture and knowledge and expertise in their land, Tjukurpa, language and family.



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# Po:rlar Yarluki

## Children's way/path

Artwork by Ngarrindjeri and Kurna artist Brooke Rigney (Rigney-Lively)



### About the artwork

This artwork brings together the voices and visions shared by Aboriginal children, young people, and Department for Education staff for the project to reset how the department supports Aboriginal outcomes in public education. It speaks to hope, possibility, and the belief that young people are the authors of their own futures, grounded in strong connections to culture and community.

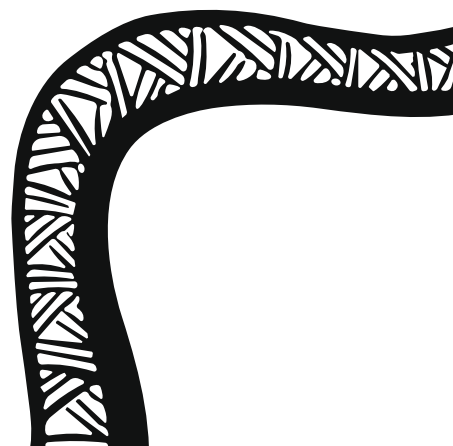
At the centre is a meeting place, representing the Strategic Reset project and governance guided by Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. It reflects deep listening and leadership shaped by the voices of children.

Within this central meeting place are two circles of people, symbolising community holding and supporting young people in their self-determination, with their voices placed at the heart of all decisions.

Journey lines at the base of the artwork trace the path from past to present, honouring ancestors and Elders who fought for change in education. These paths carry forward through Aboriginal staff today, continuing their legacy into the future.

Journey lines and footprints moving upward represent the future paths of young people as they are supported to thrive in both education and culture.

Animal tracks and the patterns and details within the bottom meeting places that those Elders and ancestors are represented at, reflect connection to land, culture, and Dreaming, and the strength young people carry through these ties. The colours across the artwork acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and homelands—from coast and rivers to forests, hills, and desert sands. With the cross-hatching throughout symbolises the strength and interconnectedness of culture, woven through community, journeys, and shared futures.





# A word from the Minister

## Niina Marni.

Education has the power to change lives.

As someone who grew up in country South Australia and was the first in my family to attend university, I have experienced the difference that a strong and inclusive education system can make. Education opens doors. It builds confidence, strengthens communities, and ensures that every young South Australian has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

That understanding sits at the heart of the Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes in public education.

Every day in every public education site, our dedicated teachers, early childhood workers, school service officers and support staff, work tirelessly to support children and young people to learn, readying them for a fulfilling and successful life after school.

The Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes supports our sites and corporate offices to continue this important work. It sets a clear vision for where we focus and how we strengthen our efforts to support improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.



As with many things in life, we are stronger when we work together. Education staff, working alongside families and communities, can collectively contribute to a system that recognises and values Aboriginal knowledge, culture and perspectives. This will create the conditions for Aboriginal learners to fulfil their learning potential, with added benefits for all learners.

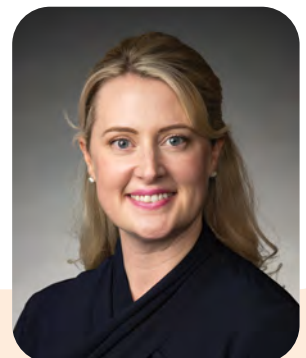
Improving outcomes for Aboriginal learners is about children. It is about communities. It is about the future of our state. When young people thrive, so does South Australia.

Every Aboriginal child and young person in South Australia deserves the opportunity to succeed in education and beyond. This Blueprint is an important step toward making that vision a reality.

Ngaityalya.

**The Honourable  
Lucy Hood MP**

Minister for Education,  
Training and Skills



# A word from the co-sponsors

Our joint leadership of this work comes from a deep and united commitment to working in partnership to ensure Aboriginal children and young people thrive.

We have taken the time to listen, hear and understand what this means for public education.

We have come together, creating a shared story and vision.

Under the Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019-2029 and through decades of great dedication and hard work across education and communities, learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people are improving. We honour that work.

To fully achieve our ambitions for equity and excellence for Aboriginal learners, there is more to do.

In developing the Blueprint, we have been led by diverse Aboriginal voices. We have heard we can't be limited by narrowly chasing targets. We need structural reform.

Equity and excellence for Aboriginal learners will come with Aboriginal voices being embedded in decision-making. With racism being acknowledged and addressed. With Aboriginal families and communities being involved in education, including in shared conversations with the school community.

This requires culturally responsive practices that respect identity, knowledge, and culture, to support understanding, trust, and collective efforts for improved outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

Making changes to how the education system and the people within it work will help to remove barriers for Aboriginal learners and enable better outcomes for all learners.

The Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes represents a recalibration. It draws on important work already underway while charting a path forward we can all confidently walk together.

It gives permission to try new things and do and see things differently. **It supports us shift our focus to making schools ready for the child** rather than the child being ready for the school.

With this Blueprint we have real cause for optimism. It brings public education an important step closer to fulfilling its purpose as being for every young person in South Australia.

We acknowledge the people involved in developing the Blueprint. The work took courage and commitment. The result is something we are proud of.

No matter your context, this Blueprint is your guide to support the success of Aboriginal children and young people in public education.



**Professor Peter Buckskin**  
SAAETCC Patron



**Donna Henry**  
SAAETCC Chair



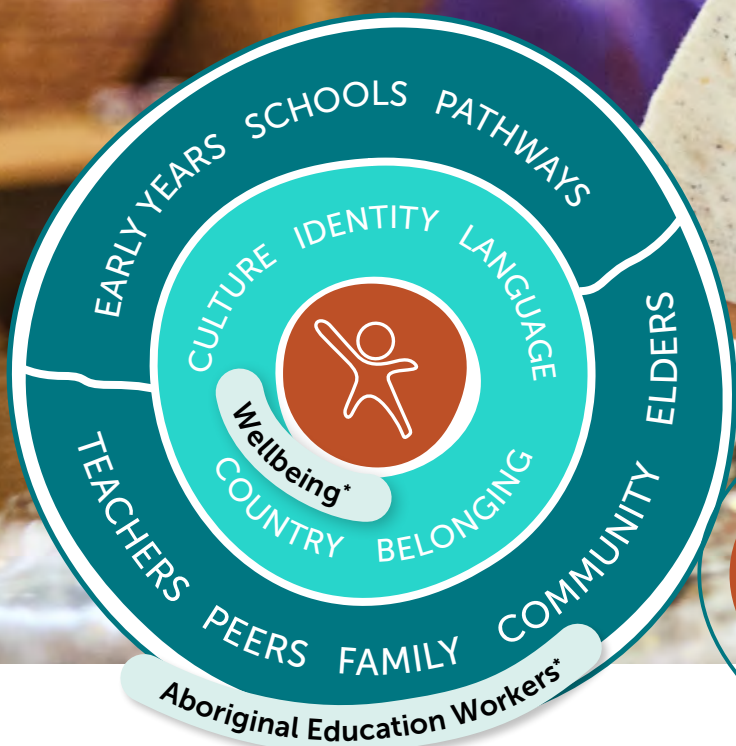
**Professor Martin Westwell**  
Chief Executive  
Department for Education

# Foreword

South Australia's public education system has a long-standing commitment to supporting Aboriginal children and young people to learn, thrive and shape their futures with knowledge and confidence.

The Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes is about supporting changes in how we work in education at the local and system levels to enable improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

Everyone working in education can play a role in achieving this.




Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Workforce

**Fig 1:** The child-centred approach to learning within an Aboriginal community context, from the department's Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019-2029.

*\*The Blueprint's Theory of Change also identifies wellbeing and Aboriginal Education Workers as being critical in the child-centred approach to learning.*

The diagram signifies the child or young person, surrounded by the essential elements for a successful educational journey. They are strengthened by their culture, identity, language, country and belonging. Their learning and development is supported by the strength of family, elders, community and the influence of leaders, educators and peers including a strong Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce." Page 9, AES



As we continue our journey of improvement and affirm our purpose as a public education system for every child and young person in South Australia, we recognise that meaningful progress requires more than standalone initiatives and programs.

Meaningful progress in learning outcomes for Aboriginal learners requires structural change - the way we work and the way we organise ourselves - in education. These changes will remove barriers and enable better belonging and safety for Aboriginal learners. It is on this foundation that learning outcomes will grow.

**This Blueprint provides an important opportunity to reaffirm that achieving our goals for Aboriginal learners is everyone's business.**

It brings clarity to our role as a system, empowers all staff in their contribution to culturally affirming learning, and sets out the foundations for collective action and responsibility.

It is also a step toward a more cohesive, consistent and transparent approach to Aboriginal outcomes, one that honours the intent of our Aboriginal education and reconciliation goals and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

With this Blueprint, we are not starting again. We are strengthening what is already working, responding to what Aboriginal children and young people, families and communities have told us, and building a unified direction that can guide us now and into the future. We are building on decades of advocacy and innovation in education by Aboriginal Elders, educators and community members.

**This Blueprint does not replace existing commitments. It strengthens and unifies them.**

It activates the theory of change embedded in Our Strategy for Public Education and builds on the child centred model in the department's co-designed Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019-2029 (Fig. 1).

**It is a critical reference point to support us to achieve what we're going after in Our Strategy for Public Education.**

Together, we can create an education system where Aboriginal learners experience belonging, identity, opportunity and success, every day, in every learning environment.

When children and young people thrive so does South Australia.

# Overview

The Blueprint provides a department-wide shared understanding of our collective responsibility to support Aboriginal outcomes in education, ensuring that public education is for every child and young person in South Australia.

## The four elements of the Blueprint outline:

- our **purpose** as an education system for Aboriginal children and young people
- **descriptions of success** so we'll know if we're delivering on our purpose
- the **ways of working** that will create the greatest impact for Aboriginal learners, and
- the **governance principles** that will support us in doing so.

Together, these elements guide the structural and cultural shifts required to remove barriers and create strong foundations for Aboriginal children and young people to learn and thrive.





## How to use this Blueprint

The Blueprint is for use by staff right across the system—including in early childhood settings, preschools, schools, local offices, services and corporate—to guide everyday practices and decision-making to support improved Aboriginal outcomes.

The Blueprint provides clarity and guidance to ensure we're all heading in the same direction, while allowing for flexibility in how we each achieve it. Some practices will need to take priority over others, providing the ability to take responsibility and make a difference based on our context and our starting point.

As with Our Strategy for Public Education, the Blueprint must be understood in context and its application tailored accordingly. Aboriginal voices are integral to understanding context along with the professional judgement of our educators, staff and leaders.



# Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes in public education:

Our collective approach to building strong system foundations



## Purpose

### Our shared foundation for impact

Together with community we provide culturally affirming education so that the education system is a place where Aboriginal learners and staff learn, work and thrive.

### Descriptions of success

#### What success for Aboriginal learners looks and feels like

- Culture and wellbeing
- Diversity in identity and choice
- Self-determination and shared power
- Relationships, Voice and agency
- Visibility and aspirations
- Community and connection
- Culturally responsive system

### Ways of working

#### How we create impact

##### System foundations

- Engaged Aboriginal learners
- Empowered Aboriginal staff
- A culturally responsive workforce
- Creating the conditions for culturally safe places of learning and working
- Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities
- A public education system free from racism

##### Individual and collective ways of working

- Building and strengthening connection and belonging
- Respecting, valuing and elevating cultural knowledge and ways
- Elevating Aboriginal voices
- Engaging in truth-telling
- Sharing responsibility while owning our actions



## Governance Principles

### How we sustain positive change

Accountability, Transparency and Truth-telling

Cultural Knowledge, Respect and Integrity

Inclusive and Shared Decision-Making

Strategic Partnerships and Leadership





## The Blueprint's theory of change

The Blueprint is based on the idea that better learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people come from how our system works, not just what we do within it.

It is also based on the understanding that for Aboriginal children and young people, strong identity, wellbeing and learning are deeply connected.

Because existing structures and ways of working can create barriers, better learning outcomes will be realised and sustained through changing how we work and organise ourselves rather than programmatic responses alone.

The Blueprint provides clear direction on the shifts needed across our system to support Aboriginal children and young people to learn and thrive.



# Data snapshot

Aboriginal children, young people and staff are across the education system in South Australia

## Student data



Approximately **83%** of school-aged **Aboriginal children and young people in SA attend government schools** (2025)



In 2025, there were approximately **13,680 Aboriginal learners** enrolled in government schools, representing **7.9% of total enrolments**



In 2025, there were **1,094 Aboriginal children** in SA in preschool at the annual census date. This is **6.6% of all children enrolled in preschool**<sup>2</sup>



**57% of Aboriginal school students** in SA government schools live in Greater Adelaide and **43% live in regional and remote communities across the State**



Aboriginal learner enrolments are expected to grow across government sites, with population projections estimating **40% growth in the number of Aboriginal preschool and school aged children in SA between 2021 and 2031**.<sup>1</sup>

## Staff data



The department's **Aboriginal workforce has grown by 31%** in the past 5 years



There are **968 Aboriginal employees** in the Department for Education, representing **2.9%** of all employees



**84%** of the department's **Aboriginal workforce are employed in government schools, preschools and children's services centres**

<sup>1</sup>Source: ABS. 2025. Table 4: Estimated resident and projected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, identification change series, sex and single year of age by South Australia—2021 to 2031; Estimates and Projections, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, 2011 to 2031

<sup>2</sup>Source: ABS Preschool Education 2025.

Did you know?



There are **942** public schools, preschools and children's centres in South Australia.



**95% of government schools and 81% of government preschools in SA have Aboriginal children and/or young people enrolled**



South Australia is home to more than **50 Aboriginal language groups**, each with distinct beliefs and cultural practices.



In 2025, **66** government schools offered **73 Aboriginal language programs**, with a reach of more than **10,000** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In 2019, there were only 48 programs.



Approximately **38% of adult Aboriginal South Australians** report being descendants of the **Stolen Generations**.<sup>3</sup>

For information on the Stolen Generations and ongoing impacts see: Stolen Generations | Truth, Impact and Healing | The Healing Foundation



There are **36 public Aboriginal and Anangu** schools, preschools and Child and Parent Centres across metro and country South Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations and descendants: numbers, demographic characteristics and selected outcomes', 2018. available online

# Aboriginal children and young people's views captured during consultation

## What makes you feel happy at school?

learning teaching other kids

friends  
teachers  
our events  
Wendy and Jo

That i know  
i Have people  
to go too

My friends, My teacher's  
Wendy and Jo

my friends  
and teachers  
playing football  
on Saturday.  
I prefer  
art and malpa.

Being with  
friends  
doing work  
lunch a recess  
learning new things  
about Culture

Coming to aboriginal

## Imagine success as a journey, what does the path look like? Is it smooth, bumpy, uphill or winding?

The Success  
is bumpy as  
there's always  
something trying  
to get in the  
way.

bumpy  
everyone has  
problems

it's smooth,  
because friends  
and teacher



i wanna go to  
university police  
academy.

Nice good Proud

it is a good  
Journey it is  
UP THE hill.

## What makes you strong in Culture?

connecting With my Family  
~~she~~ she shared my culture  
With my none aboriginal friends

Learning more about my mob

Point Pearce  
Narungga.

connecting with my family  
Having a Aboriginal  
education room

my family and learning  
coming to the the

- Being Proud to be aboriginal,
- ~~at~~ listening to my Papa when he says culture  
to me,
- Learning my culture during school hours.

Being deadly, Strong  
and Proud

My family and  
Friends.  
Sharing my culture with  
none aboriginal kids.



# Aboriginal children and young people's views captured during consultation

Can you think of a time you felt proud of yourself at school? What happened?

when one of the kids asked if I had seen his friend and I said yes he is over there.

When I finished my Jessica Mauboy English assignment

I stopped <sup>people</sup> bullying my friend

learning about the land we know

last night at the festival of music when I spoke at book week at education ministry in year 4 and doing the calaverly excursion this year in mindful mentors

when we had Family Connection Day. when I learn + to write my name: when I played sports for my school.

If you can describe success in one word, what would it be?

Nice & successful



happy less sharing is caring with others.

proud

happy

proud

deadly

What would you change at school or what would you like your school to do differently?

more Aboriginal teachers and more staff

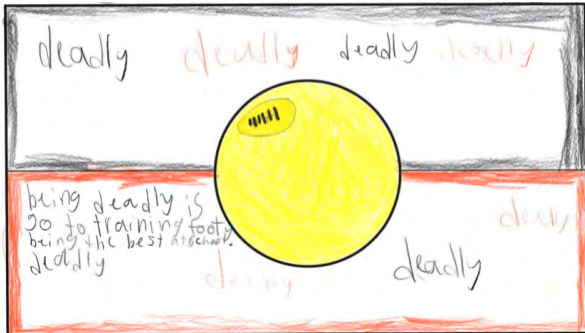
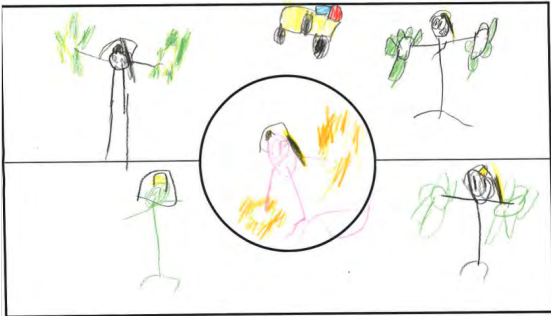
I would like our school to get rid of the fence and put a big net behind the fence to all goals.

I would get an aboriginal bage.

less bullying and stop rude teachers stop rude re-life teachers

less bullying

What does your success journey look like?



What does it look and feel like when you are successful at school?

-When im successful i get a feeling in my body that i can do any thing

Being the atsi minister of the aboriginal community



# Purpose

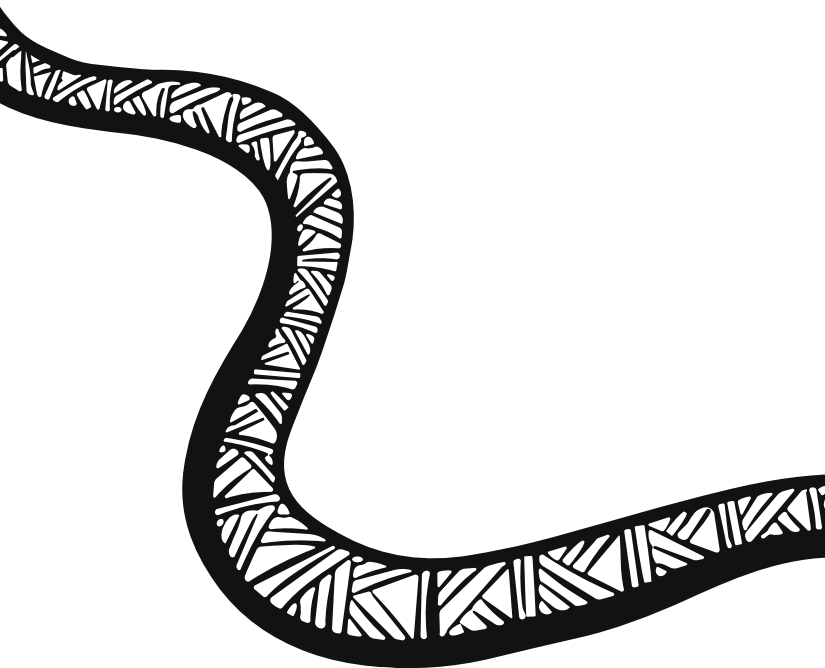
## Our shared foundation for impact

This purpose unites all our system-wide efforts in improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, so we're clear on where we're headed.

It enables our purpose in Our Strategy for Public Education: that public education is for every child and young person in every community across our state.

This purpose highlights that cultural affirmation and community partnerships are critical foundations on which effective teaching and empowered leadership can build, so that Aboriginal children and young people can learn and thrive.

**Together with community we provide culturally affirming education so that the education system is a place where Aboriginal learners and staff learn, work and thrive.**





# Descriptions of success

## What success looks and feels like

These descriptions of success describe what we might expect to see, hear and feel when we are successfully delivering on our purpose for Aboriginal children and young people.

The descriptions centre what is important to Aboriginal learners, families and communities in the education journey of Aboriginal children.

The descriptions of success enable us to understand what we are working towards.

They also provide a reference point against which we can observe change in practice and experience, and contribute to collective system-wide improvement over time.

Our theory of change is that this improvement will deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people across all Areas of Impact in Our Strategy for Public Education.

## Culture and wellbeing

**Aboriginal learners and staff feel culturally safe, valued, and connected. Aboriginal learners and staff can proudly express their identity, culture, and language, and experience a deep sense of belonging and purpose without judgment in their learning and work environments.**

For Aboriginal peoples, culture and wellbeing are inseparable — learning and growth occur through culture, story, and peoples to land, sea, sky, and community. Success means the whole person is seen and valued, and cultural integrity is honoured.

When Aboriginal learners and staff feel safe to be their authentic selves, this supports building trust, confidence, and pride: the foundations for thriving. Visible respect for culture across all sites and workplaces strengthens collective wellbeing and models a commitment to cultural responsiveness and truth-telling.

## Diversity in identity and choice

**Aboriginal learners and staff are recognised, respected, and supported as unique individuals, each with their own stories, strengths, aspirations, and ways of learning, leading, and achieving success.**

There is no single version of success for Aboriginal peoples. Success is diverse and expressed through many paths: cultural, academic, personal, and community based. Celebrating and recognising successes increases visibility of diversity.

Success is not linear or time-bound; it grows over time through connection, confidence, and belonging. Respecting learners as individuals supports and encourages greater agency in their learning journey, enabling them to thrive in diverse areas of study, leadership and life.

## Self-determination and shared power

**Aboriginal self-determination is realised and supported across every level of the department. Aboriginal learners, staff, and communities have authority, voice, and agency in shaping their own futures and the systems that affect them.**

Self-determination is the foundation of Closing the Gap and transformational change. Achieving this involves moving towards genuine partnership, where shared decision-making and responsibility are embedded in governance, strategy and daily practice.

We all have a role in supporting Aboriginal self-determination. We can put this into effect by acting with courage and accountability, and by working together to ensure genuine shared decision-making with Aboriginal peoples on matters that influence their lives, learning and leadership.





## Relationships, Voice and agency

Aboriginal learners are deeply listened to and respected as agents in their learning journey. The voices of Aboriginal learners influence decisions about education, and relationships between Aboriginal learners and educators and peers are built on trust, care, and shared accountability.

When Aboriginal voices are heard and acted upon, learners are supported to feel safe, valued, and connected. Relationships built on honesty and respect help to strengthen wellbeing, belonging, and learning.

Agency grows through trust — when learners and communities see that their voices lead to change, confidence and engagement can flourish. Success for Aboriginal learners is best recognised through individual achievement *and* by reference to the expectations and aspirations of their families and communities.

## Visibility and aspirations

Aboriginal learners and staff see themselves, their culture, and their communities reflected and celebrated across education and work. Aboriginal learners and staff encounter visible role models, stories, and opportunities that reflect diverse pathways and leadership.

Visibility helps to build belief. When Aboriginal peoples are seen in leadership, policy, and teaching, it gives effect to the notion that ‘you can be what you can see’. Success becomes something visible, tangible, and attainable.

Visibility can also mean that Aboriginal peoples are actively involved and have meaningful influence in shaping departmental policies, strategies, and governance processes. Shared decision-making helps ensure that new strategies are informed by Aboriginal voices, values, and aspirations.

## Community and connection

Aboriginal families, Elders, and communities are welcomed as core partners in education. Aboriginal knowledge, authority, and leadership are valued and embedded in the daily life of early childhood settings, schools, and the department.

Community is central to Aboriginal identity and learning. Genuine relationships between staff and communities help to create continuity for learners, foster belonging, and bring cultural richness into education spaces.

When community voices are respected and involved in decision-making, Education sites and offices are supported to become places of shared responsibility and reconciliation, where learning is strengthened by culture and where mutual respect benefits all.

## Culturally responsive system

The department is a culturally responsive system that values Aboriginal knowledge, leadership, and worldviews. Cultural responsiveness is embedded across governance, policy, and practice as an active, ongoing process of learning, unlearning, and truth-telling.

Cultural responsiveness is not static, it involves continual reflection, courage, and commitment. Over time it aims to move the system beyond compliance toward meaningful change.

Aboriginal cultural knowledge can strengthen the whole system. Valuing Aboriginal peoples as leaders and knowledge holders supports greater inclusiveness, accountability and capability to deliver outcomes that close the gap and sustain long-term change.



# Ways of working

## How we remove barriers and create impact

These ways of working are levers that—in partnership with community—can help us achieve our purpose of providing culturally affirming education to Aboriginal learners.

These are the behaviours and practices that Aboriginal peoples and experience tell us will have the greatest impact for Aboriginal learners.

Each of these ways of working can look any number of ways depending on role, scale and context. They are also often interconnected and/or mutually reinforcing.

Understanding our local context and starting point with input from Aboriginal peoples can help us prioritise the ways of working that will have the greatest impact in our context.

Working in these ways will affect outcomes across all Areas of Impact in Our Strategy for Public Education for Aboriginal learners.

## System foundations:

### Engaged Aboriginal learners

who experience positive relationships with educators, a strong sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community, enjoyment in learning and going to school, and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, guided by the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’.

### Creating the conditions for culturally safe places of learning and working

where Aboriginal learners and staff are nurtured and supported to be strong in their culture and identity, without having to leave culture at the door. See the department’s [Culturally Responsive Framework](#)

### Empowered Aboriginal staff

with visibility, voice and influence at all levels of the system to deliver meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal communities, supported through genuine shared decision-making, cultural safety and respect, and career progression. This provides modelling for student aspirations.

### A culturally responsive workforce

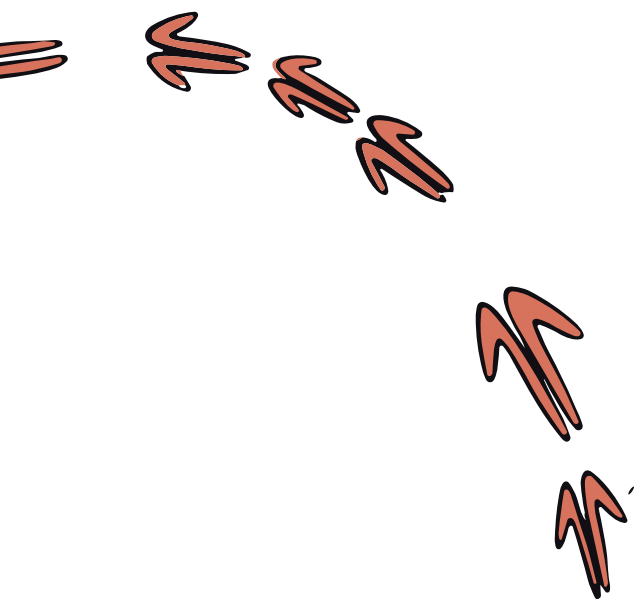
where responsibility for learning, reflection and action is owned by individuals and shared system-wide, and staff are supported to embed Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing in practice. See the department’s [Culturally Responsive Framework](#)

### Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities

that are meaningful and authentic, grounded in trust, inclusion and shared authority creating culturally responsive working and learning environments where Aboriginal learners and staff feel culturally safe, nurtured and supported to be strong in their identity, without having to leave culture at the door.

### A public education system free from racism

where every learner, employee and community member feels culturally safe, valued and respected, and where diversity is welcomed as a strength that drives equity, excellence and belonging.



## Individual and collective ways of working:

### Building and strengthening connection and belonging

by seeking out, building and sustaining respectful relationships with Aboriginal learners, families and Aboriginal staff, reflected in Aboriginal families being part of the early childhood setting, preschool or school community and governance.

### Respecting, valuing and elevating cultural knowledge and ways

by developing and incorporating knowledges about Aboriginal ways into practice and understanding the value of Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being in education environments.

### Elevating Aboriginal voices

through centering the voices of Aboriginal students, families and staff in matters affecting Aboriginal learners and engaging in authentic, deep listening and acting on what is heard.

### Engaging in truth-telling

and creating meaningful change in Aboriginal outcomes through hearing and understanding the role of policies and institutions in past and present injustices, our shared histories and continued impacts.

### Sharing responsibility while owning our actions

being open to and engaging in self-reflection, viewing mistakes as learning opportunities and incorporating Aboriginal knowledges to improve practice, focusing on growth, accountability and better outcomes.



# Governance principles

## How we sustain positive change

Governance principles help us to be responsible for contributing to our purpose.

The themes of accountability and transparency are important for Aboriginal outcomes. They underpin our commitments in the Aboriginal Education Strategy and Closing the Gap and are critical building blocks for creating trust with Aboriginal peoples.

At a local level, accountability is relational, involving mutual responsibility. It is a living practice of respect.

At a system level, accountability is also about responsibility for acting, decisions, policies and outcomes.

We also know that having Aboriginal voices in the governance of matters impacting on Aboriginal learners can create better outcomes for Aboriginal learners as well as non-Aboriginal learners.





## Governance foundations and elements

### Accountability, transparency and truth-telling

- Clear accountability mechanisms and public transparency on progress.
- System-wide truth-telling as a cultural and governance practice.
- Shared responsibility for Aboriginal outcomes at every level.

### Inclusive and shared decision-making

- Co-ownership of key decisions with Aboriginal peoples from design to delivery.
- Representative structures that ensure Aboriginal voices hold authority.
- Cultural responsiveness embedded in all decision-making processes.

### Cultural knowledge, respect and integrity

- Governance guided by Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being.
- Respectful communication and relational accountability.
- Valuing Aboriginal knowledge, languages, and cultural protocols in leadership and governance.

### Strategic partnerships and leadership

- Integration of Aboriginal leadership across all strategic and operational levels.
- Flexible, evolving governance that responds to community voice and local context.
- Brave, culturally grounded leadership that models integrity, humility, and shared power.

## Where to from here

The Blueprint is not just a document. It is a commitment to working with Aboriginal children, families and communities, now and into the future.

### The Blueprint will be put into practice in several ways.

It will be a guide for individuals and teams in our system to sustain and/or improve practice that has a positive impact on Aboriginal learners and outcomes.

This will be supported initially by sharing real examples of practices already happening in early childhood settings, schools, services and corporate offices. These examples will show ways the Blueprint can be brought to life in different contexts. They are intended to spark ideas, reflection and learning, not prescribe a single way of doing things.

Additional targeted supports will be produced for sites, where the impact for learners and families happens, to support putting the Blueprint into practice.

The Blueprint will be an anchor point that ties together related work to create consistency.

It will guide how instruments such as the department's Aboriginal Education Strategy, the Reconciliation Action Plan and Closing the Gap commitments are put into action, to create clearer focus, better alignment and greater consistency across the system.

The Blueprint will also be put into action by being a basis for identifying and actioning reforms needed in our system.

The Blueprint was created through a new way of working, where decision making was shared with Aboriginal peoples. Learnings from this will inform how our system continues sharing power with Aboriginal workforce, families and communities on decisions that affect their children.

**Shared decision-making will look different depending on context**, ranging from formal, structured agreements and governance bodies at the system level through to sharing design and delivery of learning experiences at the site level.

Bringing the Blueprint to life will happen in stages and over time. Achieving the impact we want will take commitment, care and persistence. This work will continue, guided by Aboriginal voices, with a clear focus on creating lasting improvements for Aboriginal children, families and future generations.





# How the Blueprint was created

The Blueprint was created with Aboriginal voices at its centre, because strong outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people must be shaped by the people and communities they belong to.

From the beginning, Aboriginal voices guided this work. Their knowledge, experiences and priorities informed every stage of the process, not as consultation after decisions were made, but as shared decision-making throughout.

Two groups worked together to lead this process –

- Aboriginal staff from across the education system brought lived experience, cultural knowledge and community perspectives to design the elements and share in decision-making.
- Senior leaders from the department and SAAETCC brought strategic system insights to test and refine the elements in partnership and share in decision-making.

These two groups worked side by side. Key decisions about the direction, language and intent of the Blueprint were made together, with Aboriginal voices holding real influence over outcomes. This approach reflects a commitment to respect, partnership and accountability.

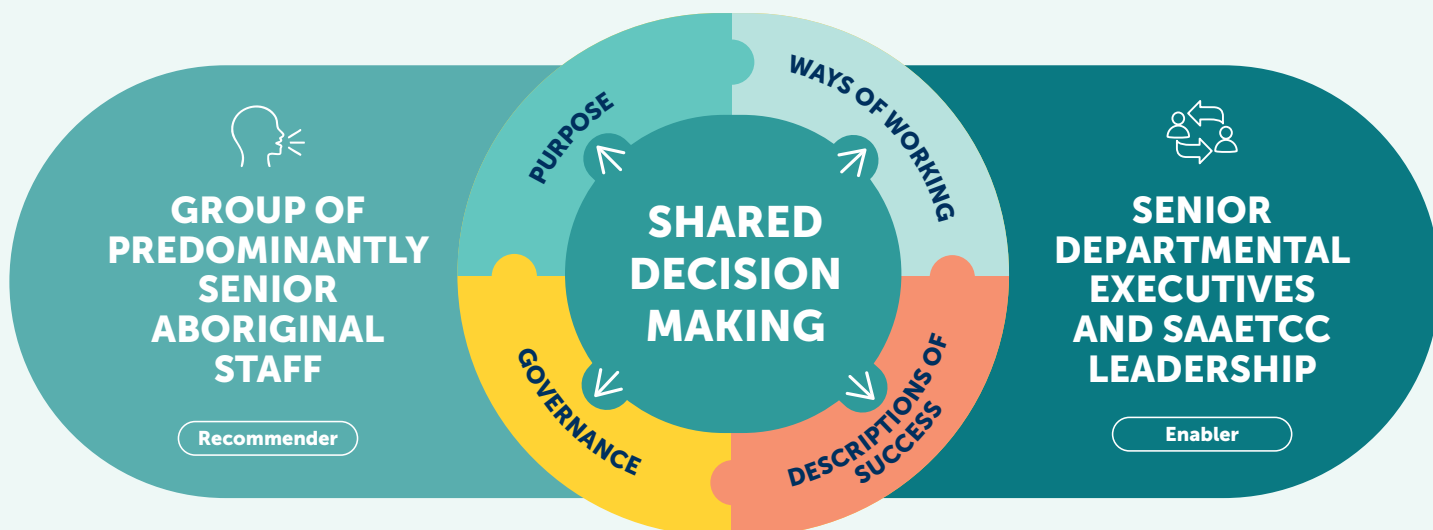


Fig 2: Governance approach to produce the Blueprint elements.

The process involved yarning, gathering together and affirming the elements through shared decision-making (Fig 3). Shared decision making was facilitated by Sharon Davis from Goorlil Consulting. Sharon is also Chief Executive of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC).

Aboriginal students and staff also shared what success looks and feels like through yarning sessions and focus groups held across metropolitan, regional and remote South Australia. What Aboriginal school communities told us matters most – identity, wellbeing, belonging, strong relationships, culture and learning – is reflected throughout the Blueprint.

## How we created the Blueprint



Fig 3. Process to produce the Blueprint elements.

This way of working is important because it helps ensure the education system is shaped to support Aboriginal children and young people to be strong in who they are, connected to culture, and able to thrive at school and beyond.

The Blueprint is a commitment to ongoing partnership, transparency and shared responsibility, so families can have confidence that Aboriginal voices will continue to guide decisions that affect their children's education.

# Explanation of key terms

For further information on common terms, see:

- the list of [Aboriginal common terms](#) on the department's intranet page (internal to the department): Aboriginal common terms (A to Z guide)
- the [Glossary of Terms](#) in the department's Culturally Responsive Framework.

## Culturally affirming education

At the time of publishing there is no widely agreed and publicised definition of culturally affirming.

In the context of this document, 'culturally affirming' is intended to mean proactively seeking to affirm Aboriginal peoples' cultural identity as a strength.

Cultural affirmation recognises cultural pride, belonging and safety are foundational to wellbeing and success. It intentionally recognises, values and strengthens Aboriginal learners' and employees' cultural identities as a critical foundation for wellbeing and success.

## Cultural responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness is learning from and relating respectfully to Aboriginal people to develop meaningful and collaborative place-based relationships. It's a journey that requires ongoing critical reflection to develop awareness. It's action orientated and a strength-based approach.

Cultural responsiveness describes the outcome when knowing and understanding (knowing), action (doing) and values, attitudes, and behaviour (being) come together.

For more information see: [Culturally Responsive Framework](#)

## Cultural safety

Cultural safety is determined by the recipient of a service, not the provider.

Achieving the conditions likely to create cultural safety is about creating an environment where there's no assault, challenge or denial of an Aboriginal person's identity or experience.

Cultural safety can include:

- shared respect, meaning and knowledge
- the experience of learning together with dignity and truly listening
- strategic and institutional reform to remove barriers to the optimal health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal people. This includes addressing unconscious bias, racism, discrimination, and micro-aggressions to support Aboriginal self-determination
- individuals, organisations and systems making sure their cultural values do not negatively impact on Aboriginal peoples, including addressing the potential for unconscious bias, racism and discrimination
- individuals, organisations and systems making sure self-determination for Aboriginal people. This includes sharing power (decision making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal communities. It's especially relevant for the design, delivery and evaluation of services for Aboriginal people.

## Self-determination

Self-determination is about being empowered and having freedom and dignity of choice. It is the ability to have power and control over your own life, and in relation to the social, cultural and economic needs that impact you.

Self-determination for indigenous peoples is a human right recognised by the United Nations. For Aboriginal peoples, this includes being able to make decisions that affect Community and being able to practice culture. It means recognition and respect for Aboriginal peoples' own decision-making and knowledge systems. See: [Aboriginal common terms](#) (A to Z guide)

## Shared decision-making

The [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) defines shared decision-making as being (cl.32(c)):

- by consensus, where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as the governments
- transparent, where matters for decision are in terms that are easily understood by all parties and where there is enough information and time to understand the implications of the decision
- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives can speak without fear of reprisals or repercussions
- where a wide variety of groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including women, young people, elders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability can have their voice heard
- where self-determination is supported, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience is understood and respected
- where relevant funding for programs and services align with jointly agreed community priorities, noting governments retain responsibility for funding decisions
- where partnership parties have access to the same data and information, in an easily accessible format, on which any decisions are made.

## Truth-telling

ANTAR defines truth telling as 'any activity or process that exposes historical and/or ongoing truths.'

See: [What is truth-telling?](#) – ANTAR

Reconciliation Australia explains that truth-telling enables a fuller and more accurate account of Australia's history to recognise the strength and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It acknowledges the historical silencing of injustices and ongoing impacts of colonisation on First Nations peoples. Truth-telling is fundamental to advancing reconciliation.

For more information see: [What is truth telling?](#)



# Acknowledgement and thank you

**The development of this Blueprint represents a significant achievement. This work has been shaped through care, courage and shared responsibility.**

The project facilitators extend deep thanks to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge and lived experience to develop the Blueprint. We are grateful to all involved for the trust placed in the process.

We acknowledge the decades of advocacy and trailblazing in education by Aboriginal Elders, workforce, community members and families which has made this work possible.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal members of the two project governance groups whose voices and lived experiences profoundly shaped and strengthened the Blueprint. We recognise that participating in this work required time, emotional labour and commitment, often alongside demanding roles and responsibilities.

We acknowledge Professor Peter Buckskin, Donna Henry and Christine Thyer from SAAETCC who played a pivotal role as leaders and partners in this work.

We acknowledge the critical role of Aboriginal workforce, learners, families, Elders and community members whose voices and experiences informed this work through yarning and engagement facilitated by SAAETCC and the department.

We acknowledge the senior departmental executives who stepped into the unknown with new ways of working and making decisions, and who walked alongside the Aboriginal members of the project governance groups to bring this Blueprint to life.

We thank Sharon Davis for their expert facilitation and insights, guidance and support for the process and outcome.

This Blueprint is not an endpoint. It stands as a strong foundation for lasting change across the public education system in South Australia.

With respect and gratitude, we thank everyone who has walked and who will continue to walk this journey together.





