



First Nations EDUCATION POLICY

We want to hear from you

The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia where this work has been developed and where it will be read, discussed, and shared. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations Peoples.

Context

Education is a critical foundation for improving life outcomes of First Nations learners. It is also a key enabler for realising the shared ambition of Closing the Gap.

While governments and education systems have maintained a longstanding commitment to improving First Nations education outcomes, progress has been inconsistent and slow.

About the new First Nations Education Policy

The Australian Government is developing a new national First Nations Education Policy (the Policy) in partnership with First Nations education stakeholders and state and territory governments. The Policy aims to provide a long-term national framework to accelerate the improvement of First Nations learners' outcomes, across the education lifecycle.

The Policy is being developed in partnership with First Nations peak organisations (First Nations Partners*) — NATSIEC, SNAICC, NATSIPA, NIYEC, NATSIHEC — and state and territory governments, the non-government education sector, education unions, and professional associations.

Alongside First Nations Partners' engagement with First Nations stakeholder and communities, the Department is seeking feedback on the draft Policy's **Vision**, **Guiding Principles**, **Focus Areas** and **Expected Outcomes** to help test whether the proposed direction reflects the priorities, opportunities and challenges in First Nations education and to identify opportunities to strengthen the final Policy.

Why the Policy is needed

Honouring the work of the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, a new First Nations Education Policy will help to reset a national effort to support First Nations learners to thrive.

Important information

This material has been developed for the purpose of consultation and does not represent the final First Nations Education Policy. Policy content is still in development and may change as a result of feedback received through consultations, further partnership work, and consideration by governments and key stakeholders. Feedback received through this process will be considered alongside advice from First Nations Partners, jurisdictions, education stakeholders and community engagement activities.

We appreciate the time and expertise you bring to this consultation and thank you for helping shape the final First Nations Education Policy.

*National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC), SNAICC – National Voice of our Children (SNAICC), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA), the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC), and the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSHEC).

Scope and intent of the Policy

The Policy responds directly to stakeholder feedback calling for a clearer, stronger national direction to accelerate improvement in First Nations outcomes across the education lifecycle.

Early Years

Early childhood education and care

Schools

Formal years of schooling

Tertiary

VET, higher education and post-school pathways

The Policy is intended to complement existing strategies and policies across the education lifecycle, not duplicate or override.

In this work, we use ‘learners’ to refer to First Nations people who participate in education, wherever they happen to be on their journey across the education lifecycle. This includes, but is not limited to, children in early education, students actively engaged in education (across schooling, VET and university), as well as those that are looking to re-engage in schooling or tertiary education.

Developing the Policy in partnership

The Australian Government is working in partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC), state and territory governments, and other First Nations education peak organisations to develop the Policy.

First Nations-led engagement

First Nations partners led engagement activities in Term 1, 2026 and are currently testing the draft Policy direction with First Nations stakeholders and Community.

Public consultation

The Australian Government held an online public submissions process, welcoming submissions from individuals and organisations.

Policy Working Group

Co-chaired by NATSIEC and the department, and including representatives from First Nations Partners, every state and territory, the non-government school sector and education unions. The group has met regularly since September 2025.

What we heard

Co-drafting of the Policy by NATSIEC and the department has been informed by engagement and research, particularly First Nations Partners’ feedback from their consultation activities. There was strong alignment across many of the themes raised through both the First Nations and broader stakeholder engagement, and desktop review of relevant research and literature.

Findings highlighted need for education systems* that:

- ✓ take responsibility for First Nations learners’ experiences and outcomes,
- ✓ name, prevent and respond to racism, including visible and accessible reporting mechanisms,
- ✓ embed cultures and languages in learning and foster culturally safe learning environments,
- ✓ strengthen teaching and learning programs, responsive to local context and learner needs,
- ✓ work in partnership and shared decision-making across sectors and every level of education, and
- ✓ support transitions, wraparound supports and re-entry into education.

**Education system/s in the Policy refers to the structured framework through which educational institutions deliver knowledge and skills to learners. It includes the full range of formal education and learning opportunities available to children, young people and adults, whether they are provided and/or financed by government or non-government sectors. (UNESCO, 2026)*

Policy direction - translating national commitments into action

The Policy aims to translate national commitments such as the Mparntwe Education Declaration, the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, the Universities Accord, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap into tangible action.

Implementation of the Policy will be flexible and adaptable to local context.

The Policy has a focus on system responsibility guiding local response and action, with First Nations learners centred in education design and delivery.

A 10-year Vision for First Nations Education

Fair and equitable education systems where First Nations learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive. Education is self-determined, accountable, free from racism, enables culturally safe learning, and affirms identity, culture, and connection.

Survey question 1

Do you support the 10-year vision for the Policy? **Yes or no?**

If no, what do you think is missing from the 10-year vision or what changes would you suggest?

The Model Underpinning the Policy

This model visually represents the First Nations Education Policy as a systemwide responsibility, placing First Nations learners* at the centre of education design and delivery.

First Nations learners are at the centre of the First Nations Education Policy model, reflecting the Policy's commitment to embedding the interconnected prior knowledge, lived experiences, needs, identities, aspirations and strengths of learners, families, kin, communities, culture and Country at the heart of all education decisions and design.

Surrounding the learner are the three Focus Areas, which together translate the Policy into practical, consistent, and place-based actions and outcomes across early childhood education, schooling, and tertiary education.

Encircling the Focus Areas is a representation of the Guiding Principles, which highlight that all Policy Actions and Opportunities and Expected Outcomes must be underpinned by system responsibility to deliver education.

NB. This diagram is adapted from NIYEC and NATSIEC.



Survey question 2

Do you support the model underpinning the Policy? **Yes or no?**

If no, what do you think is missing from the **model underpinning the Policy** or what changes would you suggest?

First Nations Learner Centred Success

Education systems are responsible for creating the conditions for First Nations learners to thrive. Consultations highlighted that learning should respond to learners' interconnected needs, be grounded in genuine Partnership, high expectations and strengths-based practice, and be free from deficit narratives.

A thriving First Nations learner is one that is:

Safe	First Nations learners are safe in all learning settings; culturally safe; free from racism and discrimination; and are supported by educators who build safe, strong and trusting relationships with them, their families and their communities.
Strong	First Nations learners are socially, emotionally, physically and academically strong; their identity and culture is respected and affirmed in their learning. They have the confidence and skills to navigate culturally safe systems that are accessible, responsive and ready for learners, families and communities.
Ready	First Nations learners are ready and equipped to be active members of their community; they are confident, lifelong learners whose developmental and educational needs are met as they change over different stages of education, and who are empowered decision-makers with agency in their education and life journey.
Connected	First Nations learners know that education settings and community are connected in Partnership; connection and belonging are fundamental to learning — families and community are respected, included, and genuinely engaged as Partners in learning.
Valued	First Nations learners and their communities feel seen for who they are and valued for what they bring with them to learning; their prior knowledge, lived experiences and cultural identity, connection to Country, and the many strengths of who they are, are affirmed and reflected in their learning.
Excelling	First Nations learners are supported to excel in education systems where success is determined with First Nations Peoples; they are achieving learning success and excellent educational and employment outcomes through learning that is responsive to and reflects identity, language, culture and their own worldviews.

Survey question 3	Do you support the Policy's indicators of a thriving First Nations learner? Yes or no? If no, what do you consider to be missing or what changes would you suggest?
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Guiding Principles – the system responsibility

These six **Guiding Principles** establish the shared ways of working that underpin the Policy and build on the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. They operate across all Focus Areas, help to ensure education settings are ready to effectively support First Nations learners. The Guiding Principles are intended to guide implementation of the Policy.

First Nations Learners at the Centre

Education systems embed the interconnected needs, identities and diverse contexts of First Nations learners at the centre of education design and delivery. Systems recognise families, kin, communities, culture and Country as inherent to learner development, and recognising learner agency by enabling First Nations learners' voices, identities, ambitions and aspirations to shape teaching, learning and participation in education.

Anti-Racism

Eliminating racism is a responsibility of governments, education systems and leaders, supported by collective action across all education settings. Systems must ensure education settings are free from racism and discrimination towards First Nations Peoples by embedding clear definitions, expectations, accountability and accessible mechanisms to prevent, report, respond to and eliminate interpersonal and systemic racism.

Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making

Education systems establish genuine, ongoing Partnerships and shared decision-making with First Nations Peoples at national, sectoral, jurisdictional, regional and local levels. These Partnerships recognise First Nations learners, families, communities, community-controlled services and peak bodies as decision makers whose priorities shape education design and delivery.

First Nations Governance

Education systems recognise that First Nations self-determination requires a shift in decision-making authority, giving First Nations learners, communities, community-controlled organisations and representative peak bodies a stronger role in the design, governance, measurement and evaluation of education. The Policy sets a clear direction toward genuine First Nations Governance, shared accountability and stronger community authority, aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007).

Accountable and transparent

Education systems and leaders are accountable for accelerating improvement in First Nations education outcomes, ensuring First Nations learners are centred in education design in partnership and shared decision making with First Nations Peoples. Shared accountability is supported by transparency in how funding is decided, allocated, used and assessed, reflecting calls for 'glow in the dark funding'.

Quality Teaching and Learning

The system recognises quality teaching and learning as relational, shaped by culture, language, family, community and Country. It is supported by effective pedagogy, high expectations and strengths-based culturally responsive practices, and ongoing professional learning and development. Education is a collective responsibility shaped by the education workforce and community, including First Nations educators and knowledge holders.

Survey question 4

Do you believe the Guiding Principles provide an appropriate foundation for the Policy and its implementation? **Yes or no?**

If no, what do you think is missing from the **Guiding Principles** or what changes would you suggest?

Focus Areas

There are three Focus Areas which set out how education systems will translate the Policy into consistent, contextual practical change for First Nations learners across early childhood, schooling, and postschool pathways including tertiary education.

Survey question 5	Do you support the three Focus Areas detailed below in the Policy? Yes or no? If no , what do you believe is missing that should be included, or what changes would you suggest?
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Focus Area One: How are they learning?

The way First Nations learners are being taught, the learning environment, and how the environment is shaped by community and centred on the learner. Improvements to learning environments, flexible delivery models, effective pedagogy, and cultural responsiveness are expected to benefit all learners.

Actions and Opportunities (how will systems and sectors respond)

- Embed contemporary, mandatory anti-racism frameworks that require learning settings to demonstrate how racism is prevented, identified, reported and responded to.
- Build accountability mechanisms for cultural safety and learner outcomes, that are accessible and transparent for community, which include actively identifying and addressing deficit discourse.
- Embed First Nations governance structures that ensure First Nations people hold meaningful authority at all levels of education policy and system design.
- Partner with local First Nations communities, and First Nations organisations, to ensure coordinated, wraparound, multi-system approaches to support the interconnected needs of diverse identities and address barriers to success.
- Establish dedicated safe spaces for First Nations learners as part of education settings to provide culturally grounded support that fosters belonging and affirms identity.
- Build coordination and collaboration across early childhood education, schooling, and tertiary education settings to support transitions across the learning journey.
- Identify and remove barriers to education, including enabling and supporting flexible delivery models to ensure access across diverse contexts (flexible models include: on-Country / place-based learning, bilingual learning, in community distance education, community-led learning settings, boarding, and flexible VET delivery models, including for adult learners).
- Ensure First Nations learners in youth justice settings have access to culturally responsive education, coordinated supports and successful transitions between detention and other learning settings that supports learning continuity and cultural connection.

Expected Outcomes:

- Learning environments across all education settings are free from racism.
- Learning environments are culturally safe and affirming and embed First Nations identities and cultures.
- First Nations learners are taught through effective pedagogy by educators who reject deficit assumptions and support the high expectations of First Nations learners.
- Learners have agency in their education, and success has been determined with community.
- Wraparound supports are responsive to the diverse and interconnected needs and contexts of First Nations learners.
- First Nations learners are supported in transition points across and within their education journey.
- First Nations learners have access to quality education that is shaped, and not limited, by geography, language, culture, kinship, and enables learners’ options to continue learning on Country and/or within their respective communities.
- First Nations learners in youth justice settings have equitable access to quality, culturally responsive education.

Focus Area Two: What are they learning?

First Nations knowledges, languages, cultures and ways of knowing, being and doing to be embedded in teaching and learning in Partnership with First Nations communities, strengthening cultural safety and improving learning for First Nations learners. Embedding this benefits all learners.

Actions and Opportunities (how will systems and sectors respond)

- Embed First Nations cultures, knowledges, and languages as foundational to education design and delivery in Partnership with First Nations communities and learners.
- Deliver truthful and contextually relevant learning that supports cultural safety and challenges institutional racism.
- Broaden how learning is recognised and credentialed (including leadership, community and cultural learning, life skills, and pathway readiness, recognition of prior learning and micro-credentials) to support flexible, skills-based and lifelong learning pathways.
- Partner with First Nations communities and educators to review, strengthen and design new approaches to assessment that are responsive, flexible, and relevant.
- Strengthen mechanisms at the local and system level to provide accountability for learner outcomes.

Expected Outcomes

- Teaching and learning is locally relevant and culturally responsive, shaped by local First Nations knowledges, languages and perspectives.
- Learners are prepared for future self-determined pathways (academic, vocational, community leadership, life skills).
- Assessment is responsive, flexible and values different knowledge systems, languages, Aboriginal English, English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), and ways of demonstrating learning.
- Learners see the identities, strengths and aspirations of themselves and their communities reflected in their learning and how success is defined.
- First Nations communities and learners hold meaningful shared decision-making authority in the design of teaching and learning programs.

Focus Area Three: Who are they learning from?

Learning is shaped by the presence, knowledge and support of those surrounding learners. For First Nations learners, this includes:

- the education workforce, and their role in undertaking ongoing professional development, including to support quality leadership, teaching, and culturally responsive practice
- trainers and assessors, industry mentors and employers
- a broader understanding of educators — including Elders, families, community and Country; recognising the language, knowledge and relationships they bring to learning throughout the education journey. Recognition, respect and appropriate remuneration for these educators' engagement in education settings is key.

Actions and Opportunities (how will systems and sectors respond)

- Require ongoing professional learning for education workforces to develop culturally responsive practices and pedagogy of education leaders and educators.
- Strengthen educator training programs and courses to include culturally responsive practice and anti-racism principles as core content.
- Recognise, support and remunerate Elders, community educators, cultural and language workers, and other knowledge holders as core contributors to learning.
- Strengthen workforce development, wellbeing, retention, and leadership supports for First Nations people across education and training settings, and build workforce capability across educators, trainers, assessors and industry mentors.
- Embed community led anti-racism and cultural safety and wellbeing expectations and accountability into workforce standards, accreditation, and system-wide improvement processes.

Expected Outcomes:

- Educators demonstrate culturally responsive teaching practice and possess skills and knowledge of critical reflexivity and anti-racism principles.
- Education leaders provide reflexive leadership that challenges racism and works in genuine Partnership with community to strengthen outcomes of First Nations learners.
- First Nations Peoples hold leadership, delivery and decision-making roles across education settings.
- Families and communities are enabled and valued as first and ongoing educators and are recognised as Partners in education.
- Learning settings recognise and value First Nations community educator roles as core to the learning eco-system.