

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT: ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



AUGUST 2023

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples. We honour their stories, traditions, spirituality and living cultures, acknowledging their unique contribution to the life of this country.

CSNSW acknowledges Aboriginal families and communities as the first and continuing educators of their children and young people.

In referring to Aboriginal people, this document refers inclusively to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

*“The Church of Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until [the Aboriginal people of Australia] have made [their] contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.”*

POPE JOHN PAUL II

# INTRODUCTION

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Catholic schools in NSW currently educate approximately 10,600 Aboriginal students, more than at any other time in the sector’s 203-year history. The sector also employs more than 500 Aboriginal teachers, teaching assistants, community engagement officers and other non-teaching staff.

This is the second annual report on Aboriginal Education Outcomes in NSW Catholic Schools. This year’s report explores some of the trends behind the successes and challenges experienced in Catholic schools in NSW and is part of Catholic Education’s broader commitment to creating educational opportunities and high-quality learning environments in inclusive, culturally safe settings for all Aboriginal students and staff.

In Catholic Schools NSW’s (CSNSW) most recent Aboriginal Education Strategy document, a commitment was made to develop an annual reporting framework to monitor Aboriginal student outcomes against state and national KPIs, as well as collecting and sharing best practice case studies from across the System. This is in response to our constitutional requirements and the NSW Premier’s Priorities<sup>1</sup>.

Key policy documents and reports have been referenced to guide the development of this CSNSW Aboriginal Education Report and the metrics reported on, including:

- i. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council).
- ii. The Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia (Education Council & ACARA).
- iii. The Australian Education Act and National School Reform Agreement (Australian Government).
- iv. The National Report on Schooling in Australia (ACARA).
- v. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments).

The report covers a range of metrics, including:

- enrolments;
- attendance and retention;
- early development indicators;
- NAPLAN & HSC; and
- VET and Post-school destinations.

Note that data used for reporting on Aboriginal people can have certain limitations, as it requires the person to self-identify/be identified and included in reporting correctly. This may result in incomplete cohorts for certain datasets. Care must also be taken when reviewing the data as the Aboriginal cohorts are often small and easily influenced by small changes in the figures. This report will note considerations for interpretation of the data.

In referring to NSW Catholic schools in this report, this may be in reference to systemic Catholic schools only, or to both systemic Catholic schools and Religious Institute and Ministerial Public Juridic Person (RI/MPJP) schools. This differentiation is made clear in each section.

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/premier-s-priorities>>. Set by the Premier in 2019; a new Premier was instated with a change of government in March 2023.



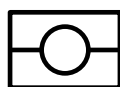
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ The proportion of students identifying as Aboriginal in NSW Catholic schools has more than doubled from 1.7% in 2008 to 3.8% in 2022.
- ▶ Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 to 11.6% in 2022.
- ▶ Systemic Catholic schools remain the primary alternative to Government schools for Aboriginal students located in remote areas.
- ▶ Despite improvements over time in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicators, there remains a gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children's development levels measured in their first year of schooling. At the last AEDC collection, 45.5% of Aboriginal children in NSW Catholic schools were on track in all five domains, compared with the Closing the Gap target of 55% and 57.6% for non-Aboriginal children.
- ▶ Attendance and retention rates for Aboriginal students attending NSW Catholic schools are higher than for Government and Independent schools. Additionally, the 'gap' in attendance and retention rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Catholic school students is smaller in Catholic schools, albeit not improving in recent years.
- ▶ Almost all Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools are achieving the national minimum standards in NAPLAN, with rates only slightly behind non-Aboriginal students. In 2022, the gap has also declined across Year 5 and 9 Reading and Numeracy.
- ▶ The proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools achieving the national minimum standard in Year 5 Reading was 95.2%, the highest in recent history.
- ▶ However, within NSW systemic Catholic schools, the gaps in NAPLAN performance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students becomes much larger when reviewing top two and bottom two band results.
- ▶ The median ATAR for Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools has been averaging approximately 10 points lower than non-Aboriginal students over the past five years, ranging from 58.7 to 62.0.
- ▶ Aboriginal students take a higher proportion of PDHPE and VET subjects for the HSC compared to non-Aboriginal students, who enrol in a higher proportion of Science subjects.
- ▶ While both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools select similar VET courses, the completion rates for non-Aboriginal students are slightly higher – 74% compared to 66% where the Full Certificate is available.
- ▶ In 2021 (the most recent year available), 81% of Aboriginal Year 12 completers and 70% of Aboriginal early school leavers were in education, training or employment. This represents an improvement on the rates of 80% and 63% respectively in 2020.

# AT A GLANCE



**10,592**  
STUDENTS



**510**  
SCHOOLS STAFF

ATSI* students at schools	ATSI students	% of total students
PRIMARY	5,830	4.4%
SECONDARY	4,762	3.5%
SYSTEMIC	9,713	4.3%
RI/MPJP	879	2.2%
BOARDING <sup>^</sup>	224	11.2%
FEMALE	5,356	4.0%
MALE	5,236	3.9%
ESL	250	0.7%
NCCD	3,352	6.3%

ATSI students at schools	ATSI students	Other students
CATHOLIC	51%	65%
NO RELIGION	18%	9%
OTHER FAITH	17%	10%
OTHER CHRISTIAN	14%	11%
ORTHODOX	1%	5%

ATSI staff at schools <sup>#</sup>	ATSI staff	% of total staff
TEACHING STAFF	157	0.7%
NON-TEACHING STAFF	353	3.7%

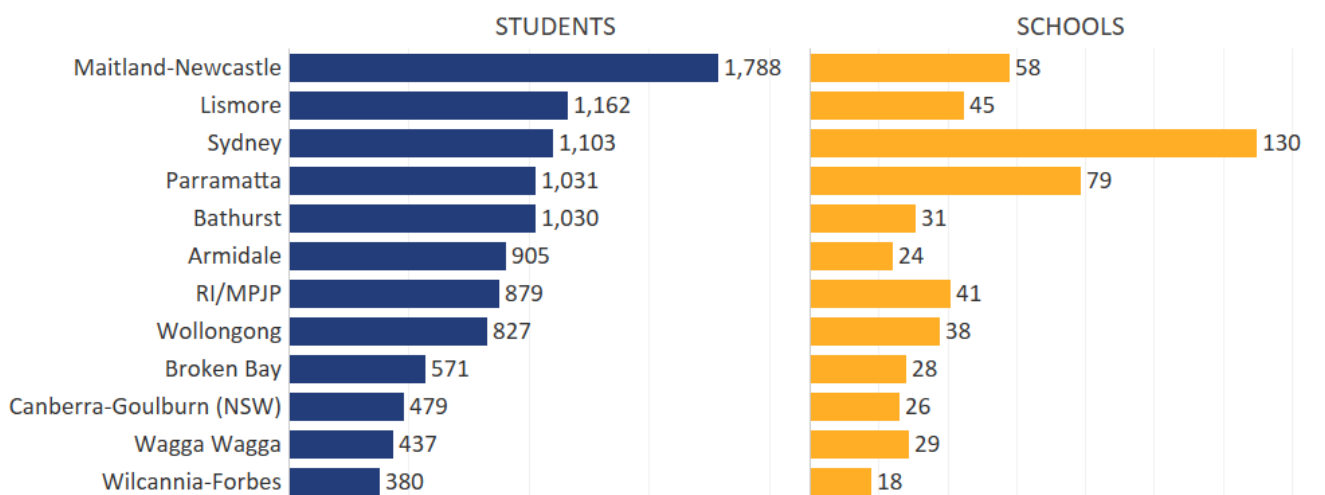
  

ATSI staff at schools	ATSI staff	Other staff
FULL-TIME	29%	78%
PART-TIME	71%	22%
FEMALE	75%	78%
MALE	25%	22%
CATHOLIC	71%	77%
NON-CATHOLIC	29%	23%
TEACHERS	74%	71%
COORDINATORS	19%	21%
ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS	3%	3%
PRINCIPALS	0%	3%
RE COORDINATORS	4%	2%
LIBRARIANS	1%	1%

ATSI students at schools	ATSI students	Share of total ATSI students
MAJOR CITIES	5,134	48%
REMOTE & REGIONAL	5,458	52%



Schools with ATSI students	ATSI students	% of schools with ATSI students
MAJOR CITIES	350	89%
REMOTE & REGIONAL	197	99%



\*ATSI – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Sources: CSNSW Census February 2023 at 17 March 2023, ACARA MySchool data 2022 for Geolocation, AGDoE August Census 2022 for NCCD. | Notes: <sup>^</sup>Boarding figures shown are included in the Systemic and RI/MPJP student counts. <sup>#</sup>Staff in Schools reported per the CSNSW Census, and may exclude casual pool staff and staff employed by Diocesan School Offices. 'Non-teaching staff' includes specialist support staff, teacher's aides, administrative staff, building operations and other service staff. CSNSW Census data from pre-2023 has been used for six RI/MPJP schools where 2023 data is not available. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Gender figures may not add to the total due to the option for Unspecified.

# ACCESS TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

## KEY POINTS

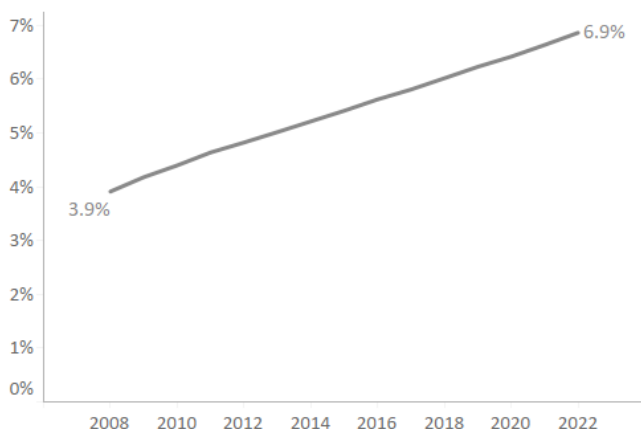
- ▶ Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 to 11.6% in 2022.
- ▶ Over the same period, the proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools has increased from 1.7% to 3.8%, higher than Independent schools, but significantly lower than Government schools.
- ▶ Systemic Catholic schools remain the primary alternative to Government schools for Aboriginal students located in remote areas.

In 2022, NSW Catholic schools educated 9,867 Aboriginal students (2008: 4,086 students). These students make up 3.8% of the sector’s cohort (4.1% for systemic and 2.1% for RI/MPJP – see *Figure 2* below), up from 1.7% in 2008 (1.8% for systemic and 1.1% for RI/MPJP).

As shown in *Figure 1* below, this upward trend in Aboriginal enrolments is reflective of the state as a whole, where the Aboriginal proportion of students increased from 3.9% in 2008 to 6.9% in 2022.

FIGURE 1

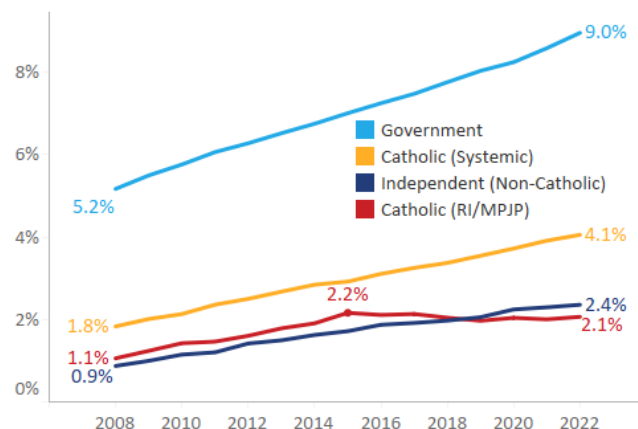
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT - ALL NSW SCHOOLS, 2008-22



Source: ACARA MySchool datasets

FIGURE 2

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT - NSW SCHOOLS BY SECTOR, 2008-22



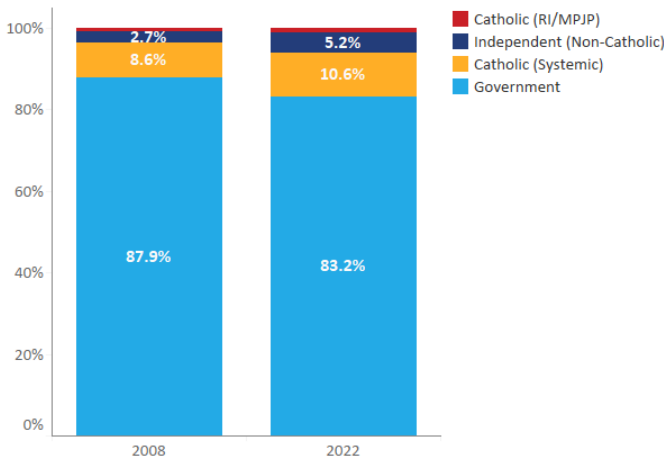
Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 (8.6% for systemic and 0.9% for RI/MPJP) to 11.6% in 2022 (10.6% for systemic and 0.9% for RI/MPJP).

The 10.6% of NSW’s Aboriginal students attending systemic Catholic schools in 2022 (refer to *Figure 3*) is the highest in the sector’s history. However, the proportion of NSW’s Aboriginal students attending RI/MPJP schools peaked at 1.3% in 2015.

The proportion of Aboriginal students attending Independent schools has increased consistently from 2.7% in 2008 to 5.2% in 2022. The increases within Catholic and Independent schools have been offset by a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students attending Government schools. Refer to *Appendix 2* for details by diocese.

FIGURE 3

PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY SECTOR - NSW SCHOOLS, 2008 vs 2022



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets

There are challenges to identifying the reasons behind movements in Aboriginal enrolments. Firstly, it is important to note that Aboriginal students are not a homogenous group. The characteristics of these students, such as socio-economic background, location and community, can vary significantly. As such, identifying broad reasons for overall enrolment movements can oversimplify the complexities of reality.

It is noted that some Aboriginal families are more transient than non-Aboriginal families and are more likely to move children between schools and sectors, which adds to the difficulty of tracking the reasons for sectoral enrolment growth over time. The strong growth in Aboriginal enrolments across all sectors (5.0% p.a. from 2008 to 2022) may, in fact, be attributed to an increase in the number of students self-identifying as Aboriginal, rather than real growth in enrolments. For context, total enrolments across all NSW schools increased by only 0.8% p.a. from 2008 to 2022. (Note, further details by Catholic School Agency are provided in *Appendix 1*).

## GEOLOCATION

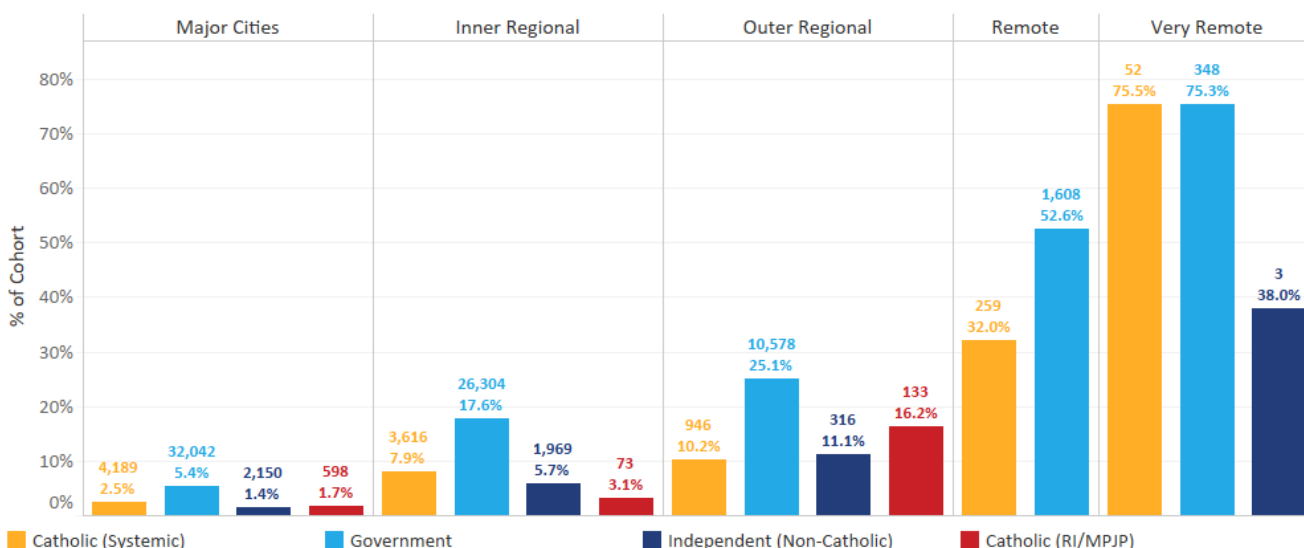
In 2022, 4.1% of students in Major City schools in NSW identified as Aboriginal, whereas the rate was nearly 4x higher in Regional and Remote schools across all sectors, at 15.9% (Geolocation categories are per the ABS).

*Figure 4* shows Aboriginal students by Geolocation of their school. In 2022, there were 38.9k Aboriginal students in Major city schools and 46.2k in Regional and Remote schools. The proportion of Aboriginal students in a school increases with the level of a school’s remoteness as shown below.

Systemic Catholic schools remain the primary alternative to Government schools for Aboriginal students located in remote areas.

FIGURE 4

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY GEOLOCATION - NSW SCHOOLS, 2022  
% OF COHORT AND STUDENT NUMBERS



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets.

## BOARDING STUDENTS

In 2022, there were a total of 12 Aboriginal boarding students attending the two systemic Boarding school facilities, St Francis de Sales Regional College in Leeton and Mt Erin Boarding facility, which is attached to both Kildare Catholic College and Mater Dei College in Wagga Wagga. This represents 4% of all systemic Catholic school boarding students in NSW. In 2022, there were a total of 200 Aboriginal boarding students across ten RI/MPJP boarding schools. This represents 12% of all RI/MPJP school boarding students in NSW. At RI/MPJP schools, 25% of Aboriginal students attending are boarders.



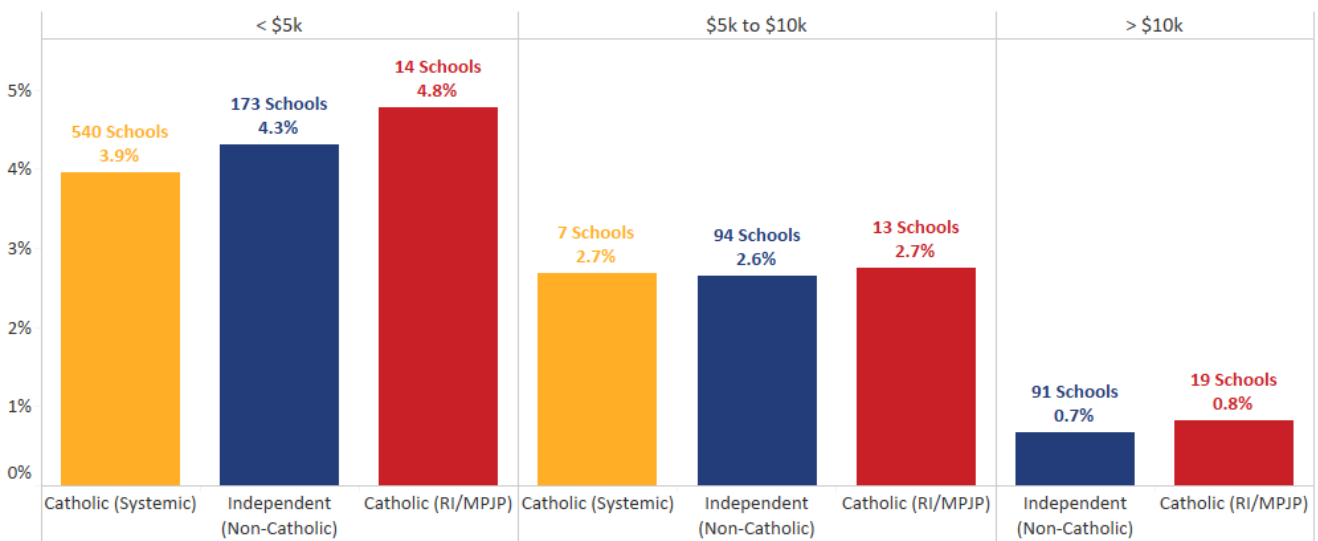
## ENROLMENTS BY FEE RANGE

As shown in *Figure 5* below, there is some variation between non-government sectors in the proportion of Aboriginal students attending lower-fee schools (less than \$5k). Given that all but seven systemic Catholic schools fall into this fee range, this suggests the overall higher percentage of Aboriginal students in all systemic Catholic schools (4.1% per *Figure 2*), compared to Independent and RI/MPJP schools (2.4% and 2.1% respectively per *Figure 2*), may be more to do with the level of school fees than other differentiating factors.

In 2022, Aboriginal students made up 2.1% of the RI/MPJP schools' cohort, which was lower than other Independent schools (2.4%) and systemic Catholic schools (4.1%) (see *Figure 2*). Despite this, the chart below shows that a higher proportion of Aboriginal students attend RI/MPJP schools at each of the fee ranges.

FIGURE 5

### ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT BY FEE RANGE, 2021



Source: ACARA MySchool datasets. Note that 2021 is the most recent available Finance data.

## NCCD STUDENTS

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) is an annual collection of information about students with disability. There are four categories of educational adjustment for students: Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP), Supplementary, Substantial and Extensive.

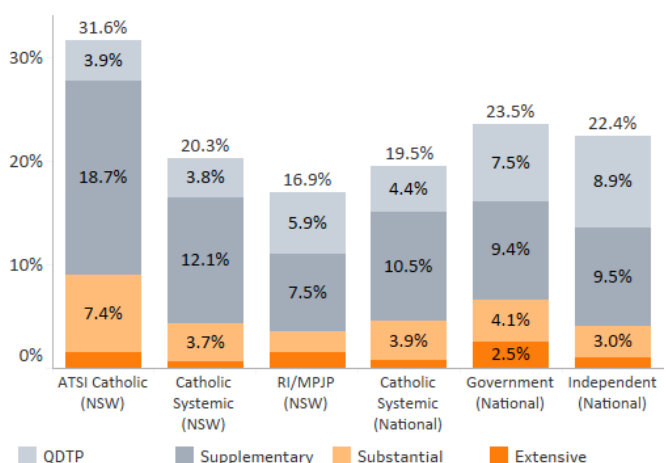
*Figure 6* shows that in 2022, 31.6% of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools are reported as having a level of adjustment under the NCCD categorisation. This compares to rates of 20.3% and 16.9% of the total student population in NSW Catholic systemic and RI/MPJP schools, respectively.

Comparisons to the Government and Independent sectors (all students) are only available at the national level, with these being 23.5% and 22.4% respectively, in 2022.

The main contributors to the variance are largely driven by greater levels of Aboriginal students reported in the Supplementary (18.7%) and Substantial (7.4%) categories in NSW Catholic schools.

FIGURE 6

### NCCD BY SECTOR, 2022



Source: ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia; NCCD 2022.

Notes: NCCD comparative sector data only available at the national level. National level data includes RI/MPJP as part of 'Independent'.

## STAFF

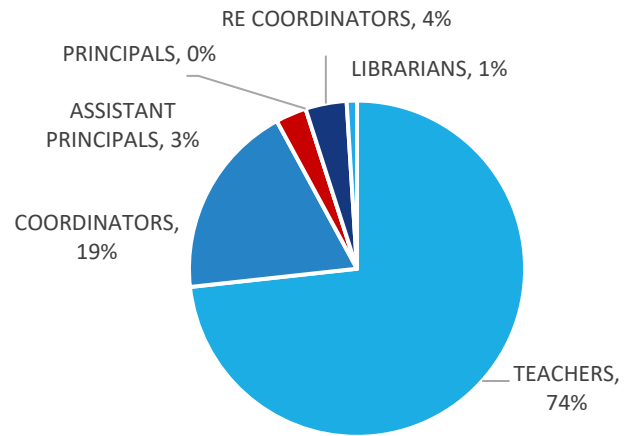
With only 0.7% of Teaching staff identifying as Aboriginal (CSNSW Census February 2023), representation is below the state level of 3.4% in NSW (ABS Census 2021). However, representation amongst Non-Teaching staff is above the state level, at 3.7%. 'Non-Teaching staff' includes specialist support staff, teacher's aides, administrative staff, building operations and other service staff.

Aboriginal staff are also under-represented in principal roles in schools. In the Non-Aboriginal staff population, 3% of teaching staff are principals, compared to only one<sup>1</sup> principal identifying as Aboriginal in NSW Catholic schools. Refer to *Figure 7*.

It is important to note that data may not capture the full extent of Aboriginal staff working in and for NSW Catholic Schools. It relies both on self-identification of the staff member and correct reporting. The Census data may also not include casual staff and any person reported as a staff member of the diocesan school offices. As such, Aboriginal staff working in NSW Catholic schools may be higher than shown in the "At A Glance" section on page 5.

FIGURE 7

ABORIGINAL TEACHING STAFF BY ROLE, 2023



Source: CSNSW February Census 2023, NESA eTams March 2023

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal Principal identified in the NESA eTams database, as of 13 March 2023, but not in the February 2023 Census. This reflects the limitation of self-reporting in both the Census and eTams data.

# AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Despite improvements over time in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicators, there remains a gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children development levels measured in their first year of schooling.
- ▶ At the last AEDC collection, 45.5% of Aboriginal children in NSW Catholic schools were on track in all five domains, compared with the Closing the Gap target of 55% and 57.6% for non-Aboriginal children.

An outcome of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is “*Children thrive in their early years*”, with the stated target “*By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census to 55%*”<sup>1</sup>.






In the 2021 census, there were 829 Aboriginal children in their first year of school in NSW Catholic Schools (of a total of 18.8k) captured in the data<sup>2</sup>.

## ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS

The AEDC is a national data collection, occurring every three years. Established in 2009, the fifth collection took place in 2021. Around 300,000 (about 96%) children in their first year of full-time school are captured. The data is used to determine whether children are developmentally on track at the time they start school. A questionnaire is completed by a teacher covering five domains for each child. (The domains are shown below.) Results for each domain are categorised as either developmentally “on track”, “at risk” or “vulnerable”. The Australian Government has invested in the collection of the AEDC, recognising that early childhood development sets the foundation for children’s later health, wellbeing and life chances.




### FIVE DOMAINS

The five key areas of early childhood development are referred to as “domains”.

-  **Physical health and wellbeing**
-  **Social competence**
-  **Emotional maturity**
-  **Language and cognitive skills**
-  **Communication skills and general knowledge**

### SUMMARY INDICATORS

Summary indicators are used to monitor trends in child development.

-  **Vulnerable 1 (“VULN 1”)** = developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains
-  **Vulnerable 2 (“VULN 2”)** = developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains
-  **On Track 5 (“OT5”)** = developmentally on track in all five domains

## TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Since the first AEDC collection, there has been an improving trend in the three summary indicators for Aboriginal children. However, there was a downturn between 2018 and 2021. This was experienced across the board, as Covid-19 interrupted early childhood learning participation. Despite improving results over time, there remains a clear gap in the summary indicators between Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children in NSW Catholic schools.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>>

<sup>2</sup> When considering changes in indicators, for a small community with 100 children, the AEDC results would need to shift by 4 to 7 percentage points to represent a significant shift in child development, depending on which AEDC indicator is of interest.

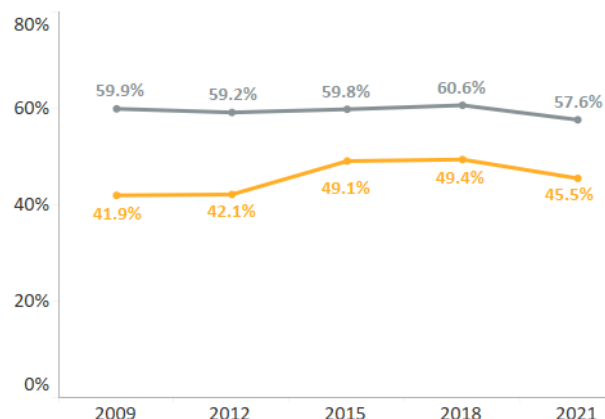
In 2021, the OT5 measure of development for Aboriginal children was 45.5% (see *Figure 8*), compared to the Closing the Gap target of 55% and 57.6% for non-Aboriginal children.

*Figure 9* shows Aboriginal children in the VULN1 category also had a clear improvement between the 2009 and 2018 collections. However, the uptick in this indicator in 2021 to 31.2% returns it close to the starting level in 2009 (31%).

Similarly, in the VULN 2 category, results were improving over the period from 2009 to 2018. The result in 2021 of 18% is now at the level of the 2009 census (18.2%). Refer to *Figure 10*.

FIGURE 8

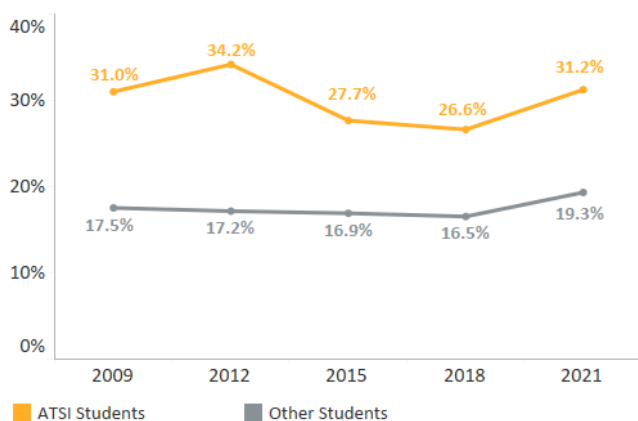
ON TRACK IN ALL 5 DOMAINS - NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Source: AEDC Data 2021

FIGURE 9

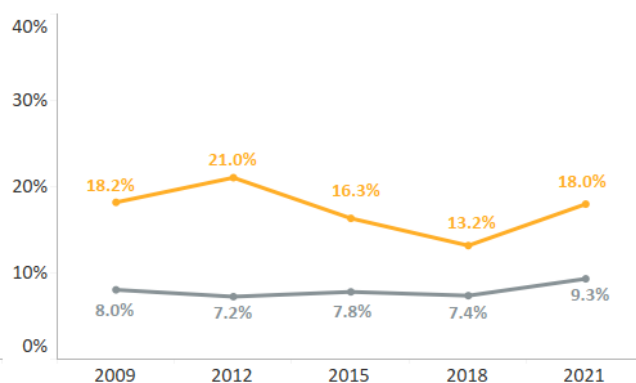
VULNERABLE 1 - NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Source: AEDC Data 2021

FIGURE 10

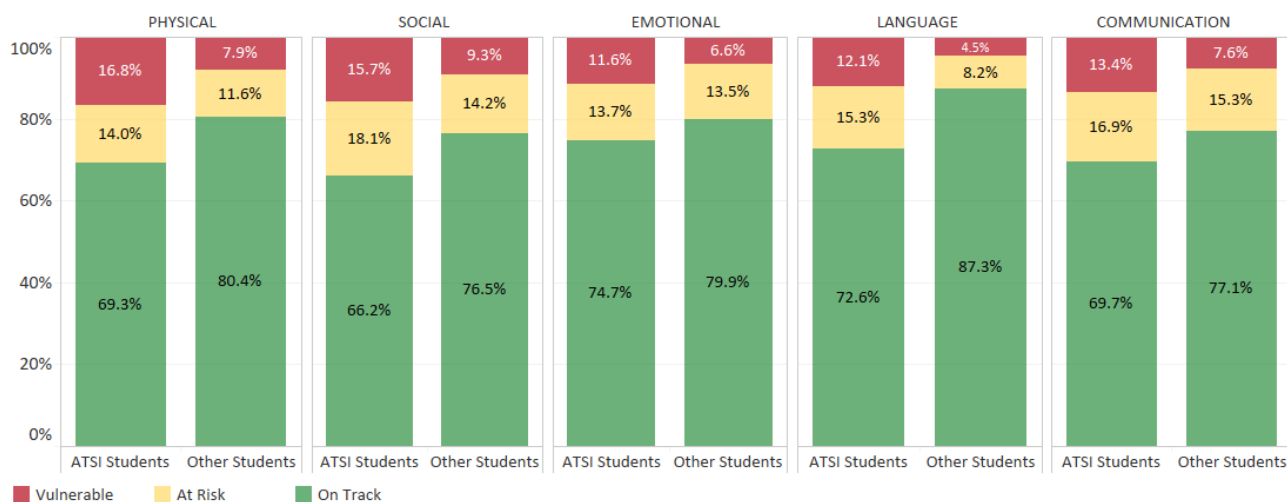
VULNERABLE 2 - NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



*Figure 11* below shows the proportion of Aboriginal students and other students in NSW Catholic schools in each of the developmental categories who are categorised as on track, vulnerable or at risk.

FIGURE 11

DOMAINS - NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, 2021



Source: AEDC Data 2021

# ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Attendance and retention rates for Aboriginal students attending Catholic schools are higher than for Government and Independent schools. A relatively large decline in attendance was seen in 2022.
- ▶ The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Catholic school students is also smaller than that noted in Government and Independent schools. However, there has been little improvement in these metrics in recent years.

An outcome of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is “Students achieve their full learning potential”, with the stated target “By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96%”<sup>1</sup>. School attendance and retention of Aboriginal students is key to reaching this target.

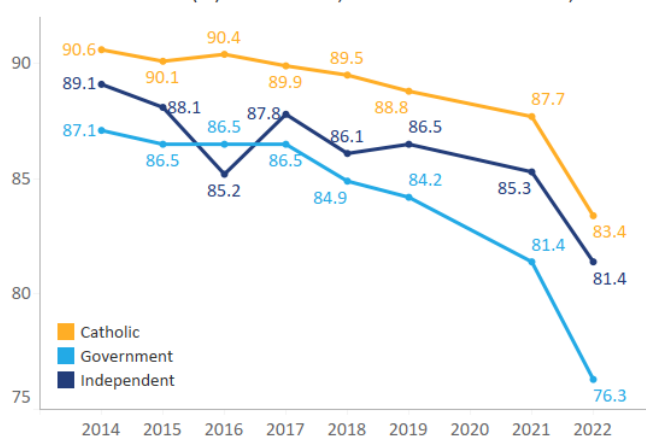
Overall, the gaps in attendance and retention rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are much smaller for Catholic schools compared to Government and Independent schools. The smaller gaps noted for Catholic schools may be partly attributed to the structure of intentional support for Aboriginal students throughout the system. Each diocese employs Aboriginal Education Officers who have knowledge of the challenges of Aboriginal students within their local schools and community.

In a number of dioceses, there has been a transition away from more traditional support for Aboriginal students (i.e., sitting in classrooms and supporting teachers) to focusing on broader community engagement. It is important to note that, despite the smaller gaps for Catholic schools, there has been no notable reduction in the gap within Catholic schools over the past few years. There has also been a downward trend in Attendance Rates for Aboriginal students in all schools, including Catholic schools.

## ATTENDANCE

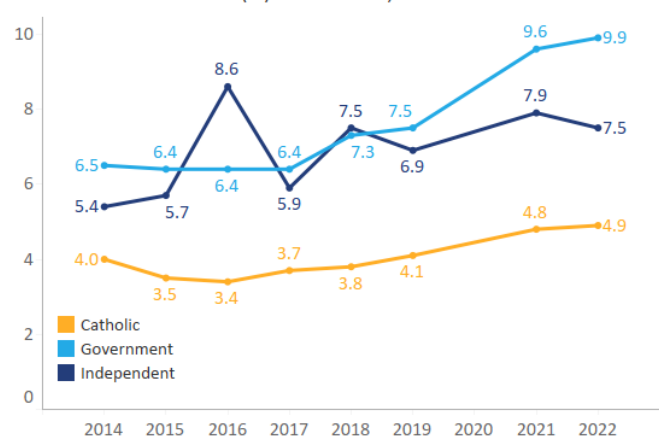
While there has been a decline in the Aboriginal attendance rate at Catholic schools over the past five years, the level of attendance is still higher than at Independent and Government schools.

FIGURE 12  
ATTENDANCE RATE (%): YEARS 1-10, ABORIGINAL STUDENTS, NSW



Source: ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia.  
Notes: 'Attendance Rate' is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1-10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period. 'Attendance Rate Gap' is defined as the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance.

FIGURE 13  
ATTENDANCE RATE GAP (%): YEARS 1-10, NSW



Notes continued: R/MPJP Catholic schools are counted as Catholic rather than as Independent. School attendance data for 2020 has not been published due to inconsistencies in the data as a result of the varying health advice and schooling arrangements across the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There may have been some impact on Attendance Rates recorded for 2021.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>>



In 2022, attendance fell again to 83.4% (down 4.3% from 2021), with the largest decline since the availability of the data in 2014. Sharper declines compared to the prior year were seen across all sectors. (Refer Figure 12)

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance rates remains significantly smaller for Catholic schools than other school sectors. It remained relatively steady in 2022 at 4.9%, but continues the overall trend of a widening gap. (Refer to Figure 13)

## RETENTION

Figure 14 shows the retention rates between Year 10 and Year 12, that is, the proportion of the Year 10 cohort who go on to complete Year 12. In 2022, the retention rate was 62.9% for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools.

The retention rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools from Year 10 to Year 12 remains above the rate in Independent and Government schools. However, there has been a continuing a trend of decline since 2017 when retention hit its peak.

Similar to the attendance rate trend, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal retention rates remains significantly smaller for Catholic schools. Figure 15 shows that in 2022, the gap reached 19.3%, which showed another increase from the prior year and continues the upward trend from 2017.

FIGURE 14

RETENTION RATE %: YEARS 10-12, ABORIGINAL STUDENTS, NSW

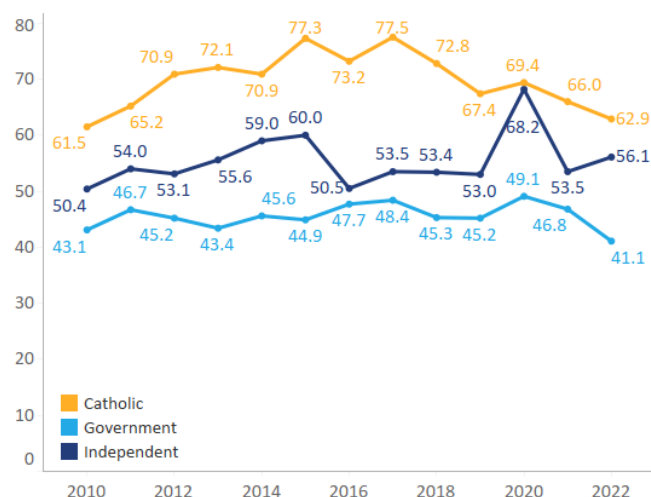
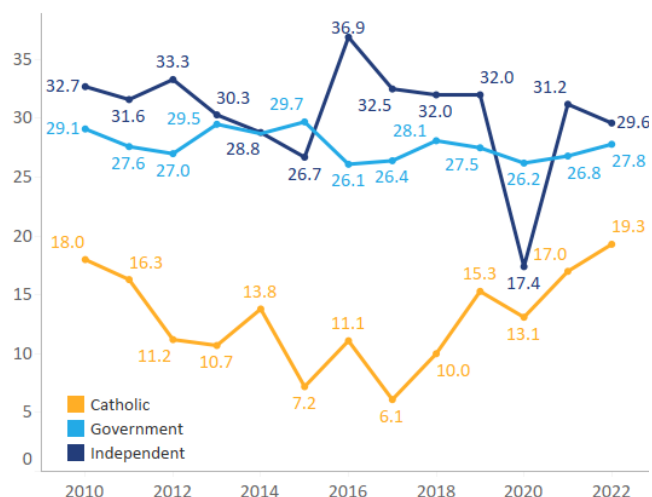


FIGURE 15

RETENTION RATE GAP %: YEARS 10-12, NSW



Source: ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia.

Notes:

'Apparent Retention Rate' is an indicative measure of the number of full-time school students in a designated year level of schooling as a percentage of their respective cohort group in a base year.

RI/MPJP schools are counted as Catholic rather than as Independent...

The retention rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools from Year 7/8 to Year 10 is 95%, indicating almost all students enrolled in high school reach their final year of school required by law. This rate increases to 98% for Year 9 to Year 10, reflecting the lower drop-out rate as students get closer to finishing their compulsory years of schooling.

The Year 10 to Year 11 retention rate is 73.4% for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools, approximately 10% higher than the Year 10 to Year 12 rate. This may reflect students continuing to Year 11 with the intention to complete Year 12 or attain their HSC, but then choosing a different pathway during that year.

# NAPLAN PERFORMANCE

## KEY POINTS

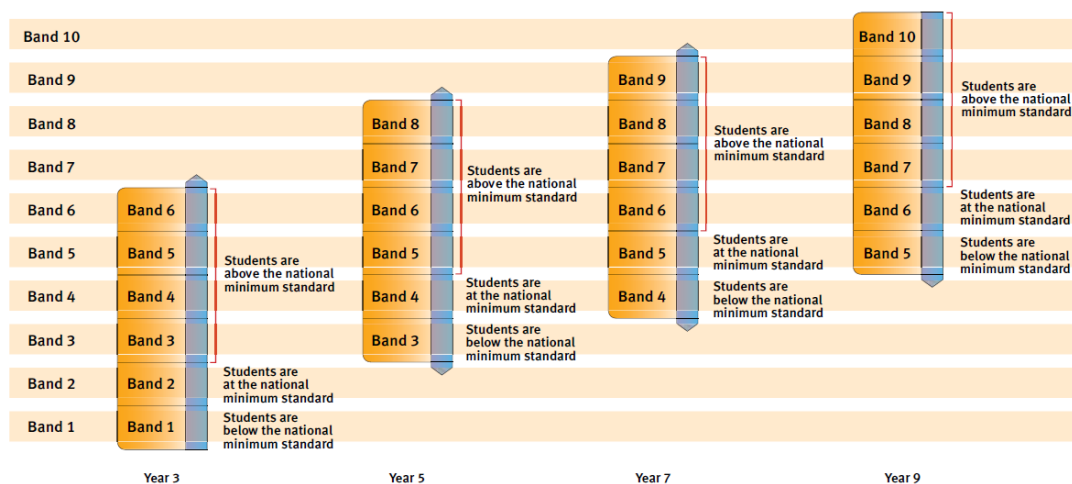
- ▶ Almost all Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools are achieving the national minimum standards in NAPLAN, with rates only slightly behind non-Aboriginal students. In 2022, the gap also declined across Years 5 and 9 Reading and Numeracy.
- ▶ The proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools achieving the national minimum standard in Year 5 Reading was 95.2% in 2022, the highest in recent history.
- ▶ Within systemic Catholic schools, the gaps in NAPLAN performance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students becomes much larger when reviewing top two and bottom two band results. However, there have been signs of improvement in Year 5 Reading, where the proportion of Aboriginal students falling in the bottom two bands has steadily decreased from 29% in 2015 to 17% in 2022.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has identified being at or above the NAPLAN minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy as a key driver of Year 12 or equivalent attainment.<sup>1</sup>

## NAPLAN ASSESSMENT REPORTING SCALE

The NAPLAN assessment scale is divided into ten bands to record student results in the tests, sat in Year 3, Year 5, Year 7 and Year 9. Band 1 is the lowest band and Band 10 is the highest band. The national minimum standards encompass one band at each year level, and therefore represent a wide range of the typical skills demonstrated by students at this level. Students who are below the national minimum standard have not achieved the learning outcomes expected for their year level. They are at risk of being unable to progress satisfactorily at school without targeted intervention.<sup>2</sup> The chart below shows the minimum standard Band levels for each year NAPLAN tests are sat (e.g., Band 2 for Year 3).

National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy National Assessment Scale



## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENT NAPLAN REPORTING

Analysis comparing NAPLAN performance between systemic Catholic school Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students should be treated with caution for two reasons:

1. The number of Aboriginal students in each NAPLAN cohort is small. Typically, fewer than 700 Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools sit each grade's NAPLAN assessment.
2. NAPLAN analysis comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students does not consider other student background characteristics. This limits the conclusions which can be drawn from the analysis.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-04-literacy-numeracy>>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, <<https://www.nap.edu.au/results-and-reports/how-to-interpret>>

## 1. NAPLAN MINIMUM STANDARD

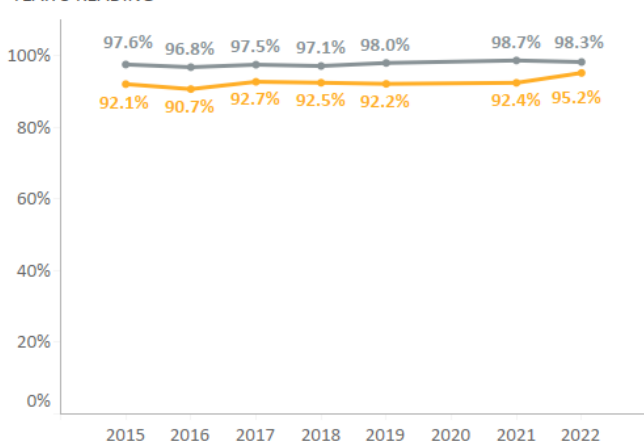
When it comes to meeting the minimum standard in NAPLAN assessments, there are only small differences between systemic Catholic school Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. For example, the two charts in *Figure 16* below show that, in 2022, there was a 3% gap in Year 5 Reading and a 4% gap in Year 5 Numeracy. These are smaller gaps than at the NSW state level where, in 2022, the respective gaps for these domains in Year 5 were 11% and 11% respectively<sup>1</sup>.

In 2022, the gaps reduced by 3% and 1% respectively compared to 2021. For Year 5 Reading, the result of 95% of Aboriginal students meeting the national minimum standard is the highest in recent history.

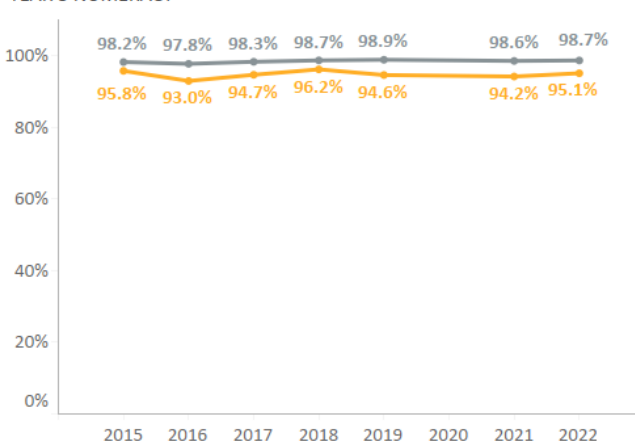
FIGURE 16

PROPORTION OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE NAPLAN MINIMUM STANDARD - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

YEAR 5 READING



YEAR 5 NUMERACY



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets.

Note: NAPLAN was not held in 2020 due to COVID restrictions.

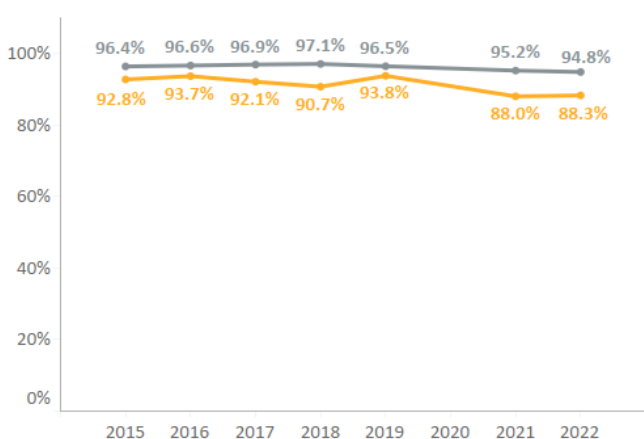
■ ATSI Students  
■ Other Students

The trend in Catholic schools for Year 9 is similar. In 2022, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was 6% for Reading and 2% for Numeracy, a slight improvement from 2021. The gaps at the NSW state level are much more significant, at 20% and 12% respectively. However, the proportion of Year 9 Aboriginal students in Catholic schools achieving the minimum standard in Reading remains below 90%.

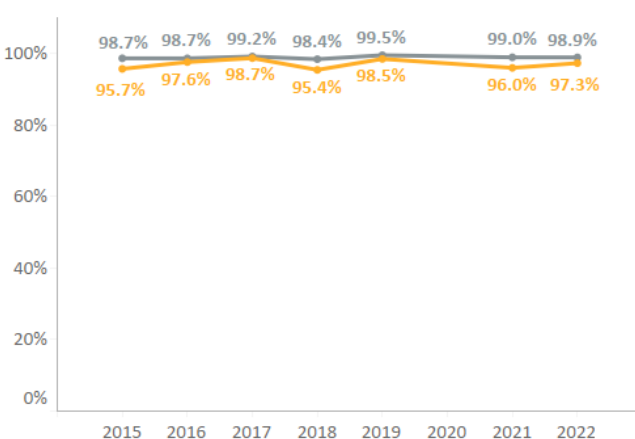
FIGURE 17

PROPORTION OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE NAPLAN MINIMUM STANDARD - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

YEAR 9 READING



YEAR 9 NUMERACY



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets.

Note: NAPLAN was not held in 2020 due to COVID restrictions.

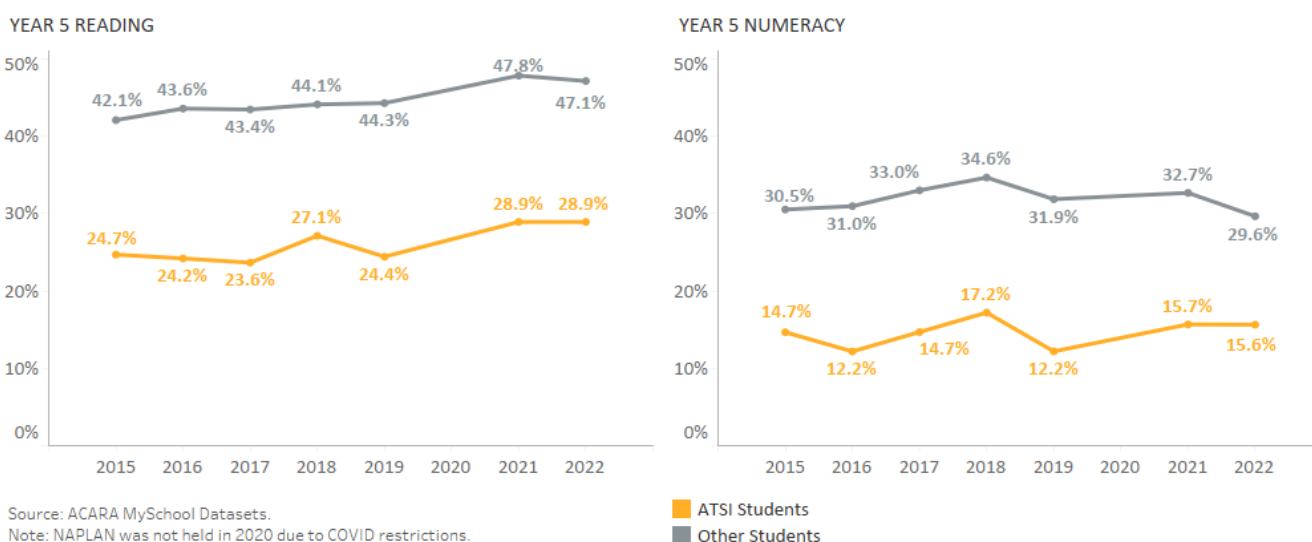
■ ATSI Students  
■ Other Students

<sup>1</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, <<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/naplan-national-report>>

## 2. NAPLAN TOP TWO BANDS

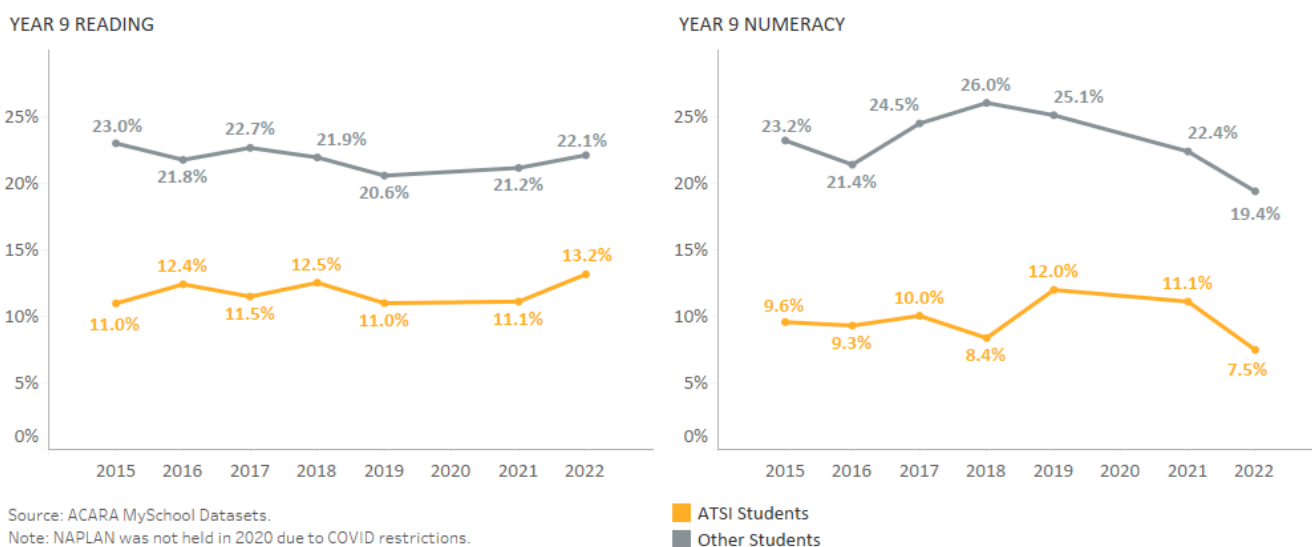
In terms of students achieving the top two band NAPLAN scores, the gap is much larger. For example, in Year 5 Reading 29% of the systemic Catholic school sector’s Aboriginal students scored in the top two Bands, compared to 47% of non-Aboriginal students. However, this gap of 18% is still smaller than the state’s gap of 29%, where only 14% of Aboriginal students achieve the top two bands in Year 5 Reading, compared to 43% of non-Aboriginal students<sup>1</sup>.

FIGURE 18  
PROPORTION OF STUDENTS IN TOP TWO NAPLAN BANDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



The trends for Year 9 are similar as shown in *Figure 19* below, with a gap of 9% and 12% in Reading and Numeracy, respectively. However, it is noted that 13.2% of Year 9 Aboriginal students were in the top two bands of Reading in 2022, the highest in recent history. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students both experienced performance declines in Year 9 Numeracy, reflecting broader challenges in systemic Catholic secondary school mathematics.

FIGURE 19  
PROPORTION OF STUDENTS IN TOP TWO NAPLAN BANDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



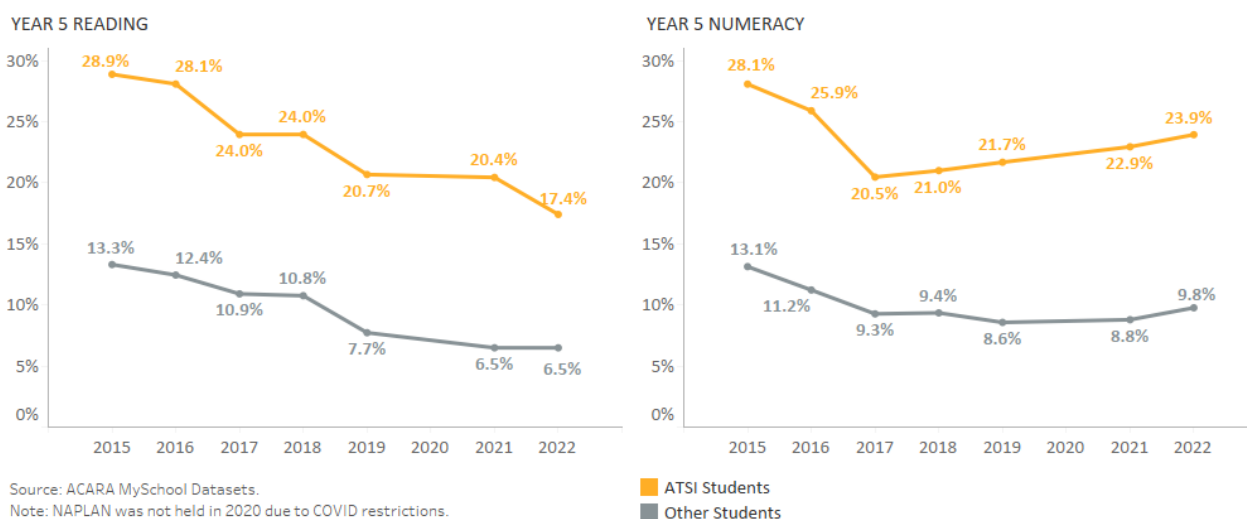
<sup>1</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, <<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/naplan-national-report>>

### 3. NAPLAN BOTTOM TWO BANDS

There has been a very encouraging trend of a declining proportion of Year 5 Aboriginal students recorded in the bottom two bands for Reading as shown in *Figure 20* below. Since 2015, the proportion has decreased from 29% to 17% in 2022, with the gap to non-Aboriginal students also decreasing from 16% to 11% over the same period. This gap is smaller than the state’s gap of 21%, where 30% of Aboriginal students scored in the bottom two bands in Year 5 Reading, compared to 9% of non-Aboriginal students in 2022<sup>1</sup>.

FIGURE 20

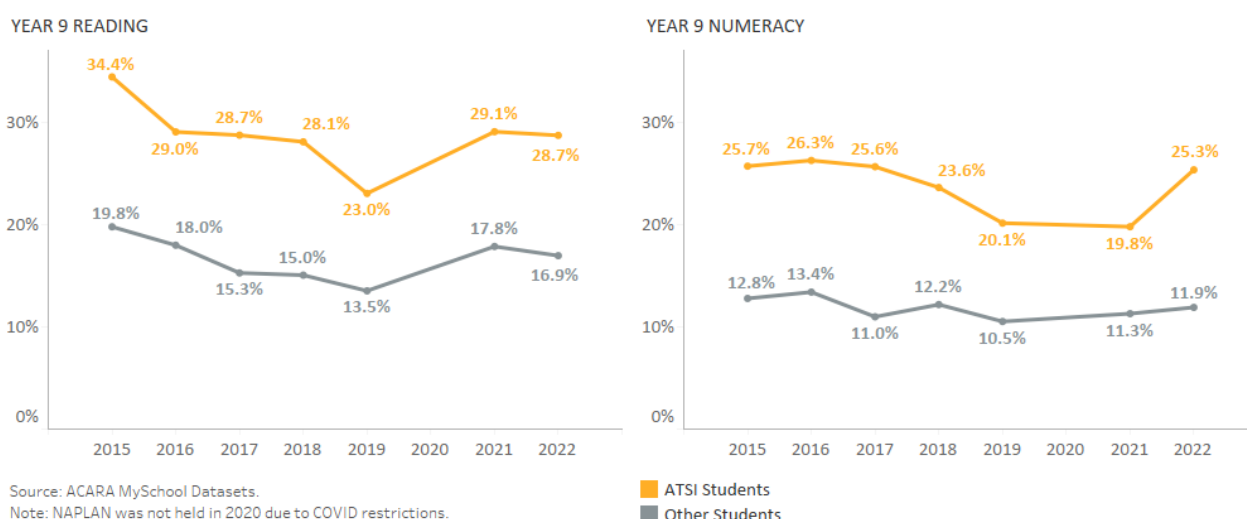
PROPORTION OF STUDENTS IN BOTTOM TWO NAPLAN BANDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Refer to *Figure 21* below for Year 9 trends. After showing positive signs in Year 9 Numeracy from 2019 to 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal students falling in the bottom two bands increased from 19.8% in 2021 to 25.3% in 2022, increasing the gap from only 8% in 2021 to 13% in 2022.

FIGURE 21

PROPORTION OF STUDENTS IN BOTTOM TWO NAPLAN BANDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



### FUTURE CHANGES TO NAPLAN REPORTING

From 2023, new proficiency standards with 4 levels of achievement for each year level will replace the 10-band structure. As a result of the new measures, 2022 will be the final year of reporting on band performance.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, <<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/naplan-national-report>>



# HSC PERFORMANCE

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ The median ATAR for Aboriginal students averaged approximately 10 points lower than non-Aboriginal students over the past five years, ranging from 58.7 to 62.0. In 2022, the gap in median ATAR was 10.3 (70.7 vs 60.4).
- ▶ The combined Bands 5 and 6 rates average approximately 20-25% for Aboriginal students compared to approximately 37-39% for non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. In 2022, the gap of 12.5% was the smallest over the past five years.
- ▶ Aboriginal students take a higher proportion of PDHPE and VET subjects compared to non-Aboriginal students, who enrol in a higher proportion of Science subjects.

## HSC ATTAINMENT

One of the NSW Premier’s Priorities is ‘Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining a HSC by 50% by 2023 while maintaining cultural identity’<sup>1</sup>.

HSC attainment rates are estimated by calculating the number of students awarded their HSC, expressed as a percentage of the potential Year 12 population, with the Year 12 population calculated based on that cohort’s Year 9 enrolment census.

There are certain data limitations making the calculation of the HSC attainment rate prohibitive. The following explanation is sourced from the ‘2022 Higher School Certificate Student Participation and Performance’:

- “Schools advise NESA of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) identity when they enter a student for the RoSA (‘Record of School Achievement’) or HSC (‘Higher School Certificate’). A Confirmation of Entry notice signed by students indicates whether the school has reported their identity as either (1) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; (2) Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander, or (3) the school did not provide any identity information. Schools are requested to provide identity information as it exists in their administrative systems; however, it is not mandatory and no identity information was provided for about two-thirds of the students.”
- “It is not considered appropriate to provide information on the participation and performance of Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait islander students when identity information has only been provided for one-third of all students.”

As such, this paper does not report on the HSC Attainment metric. However, Table 1 does report the number of Aboriginal Students who were awarded their HSC from 2018 to 2022 per NESA records, noting the possibility of completeness limitations in the data.

Per these records, 18% fewer Aboriginal students were awarded their HSC in 2022 compared to 2020. COVID-19 likely had a significant impact on school and HSC completions across this period.

TABLE 1

NSW SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Aboriginal Students</b>					
Awarded HSC	260	231	292	258	238
<b>Non-Aboriginal Students</b>					
Awarded HSC	12,572	12,434	12,283	12,251	12,141

Source: NESA HSC Extract

Note: Possible data limitations as explained above

<sup>1</sup> <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/premier-s-priorities>>. Set by the Premier in 2019; a new Premier was instated with a change of government in March 2023.

## ATAR TRENDS

The percentage of non-Aboriginal HSC students eligible for an ATAR in systemic Catholic schools remained steady at 82% in 2022.

The percentage of Aboriginal students eligible for an ATAR increased to 68% in 2022, reducing the gap to 14%, the lowest level over the past five years. Refer to *Table 2* for further details.

For context, 50% of Aboriginal students in NSW schools who were awarded their HSC were eligible for an ATAR.<sup>1</sup>

The median ATAR for non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools has been approximately 70 to 71 over the past five years and is generally close to the overall NSW median (71.25 in 2022).

The median ATAR for Aboriginal students has been averaging approximately 10 points lower over the past five years, ranging from 58.7 to 62.0. In 2022, the gap in median ATAR was 10.3. (The Median ATARs noted here are an estimate based on CSNSW modelling that utilises HSC marks and Tables A3 and A9 of the “Preliminary Report on the Scaling of the 2022 NSW HSC – UAC”.)

TABLE 2

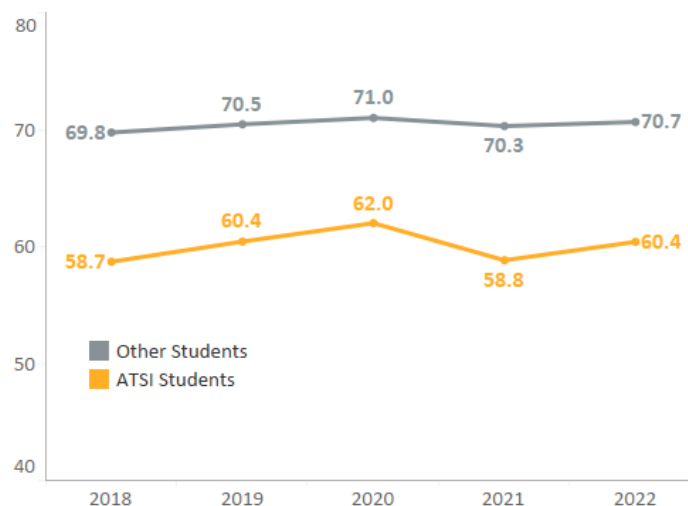
NSW SYSTEMIC SCHOOLS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Aboriginal Students</b>					
Eligible for ATAR	163	152	185	170	161
Awarded HSC	260	231	292	258	238
% Eligible for ATAR	63%	66%	63%	66%	68%
<b>Non-Aboriginal Students</b>					
Eligible for ATAR	10,364	10,314	10,034	10,014	9,986
Awarded HSC	12,572	12,434	12,283	12,251	12,141
% Eligible for ATAR	82%	83%	82%	82%	82%

Source: NESA HSC Extract

Note: Possible data limitations as explained above

FIGURE 22

MEDIAN ATAR TRENDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



<sup>1</sup> NESA HSC Briefing Pack 2022

## HSC BAND TRENDS

For each course, performance bands indicate levels of achievement demonstrated by students. For a 2-Unit course, Band 6 indicates the highest level of performance, while Band 1 indicates that a student's performance is considered to be below the minimum standard expected<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 23 below groups HSC Bands 1 & 2, 3 & 4 and 5 & 6 for HSC subjects studied by Aboriginal students between 2017 and 2022. The Bands 5 & 6 rate increased from 20.0% in 2021 to 24.5% in 2022. The Bands 1 & 2 rate decreased from 14.6% in 2021 to 12.8% in 2022.

Figure 24 compares the Bands 5 & 6 rate for HSC subjects completed by Aboriginal students mentioned above, with the Bands 5 & 6 rate for non-Aboriginal students. The overall rate for non-Aboriginal students in NSW systemic Catholic schools dropped to 37.0% in 2022, which, along with the increase for Aboriginal students mentioned above, helped reduce the gap to 12.5% compared to 19.2% in 2021.

FIGURE 23

ABORIGINAL STUDENT HSC BAND GROUPS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

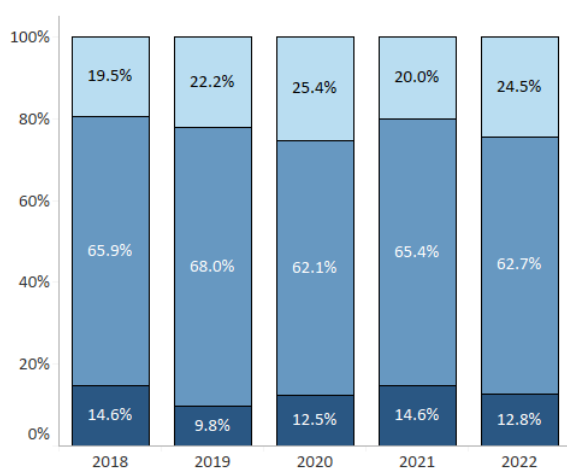
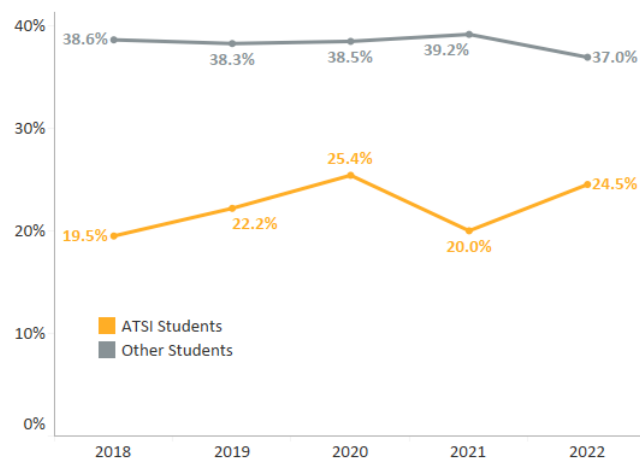


FIGURE 24

BANDS 5 & 6 RATES - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Source: NESA HSC Extract

## HSC SUBJECT SELECTION

Table 3 shows the proportion of total HSC subject units taken in each of the key learning areas by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. While the top three key learning areas are the same for both groups, Aboriginal students take a higher proportion of PDHPE and VET subjects compared to non-Aboriginal students, who enrol in a higher proportion of Science subjects.

High-scaling subjects represent 9% of HSC units taken by Aboriginal students compared to 17% for non-Aboriginal students. High-scaling subjects include Physics, Chemistry, Economics, English Advanced, Mathematics Advanced, Music 2 and all Extension subjects.

TABLE 3 – HSC Key Learning Area by % of Units Taken (2022)

Key Learning Area	Aboriginal Students	Non-Aboriginal Students
Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)	27.0%	27.3%
English	18.0%	19.1%
Mathematics	15.3%	17.4%
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)	13.4%	9.4%
Science	9.3%	12.1%
Technologies	6.4%	6.3%
Vocational and Educational Training (VET)	5.2%	2.9%
Creative Arts	5.2%	4.4%
Languages	0.3%	1.1%

Source: NESA HSC Extract

Note: HSIE includes subjects such as History, Geography, Economics, Business Studies, Legal Studies, Aboriginal Studies and Studies of Religion.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://arc2.nesa.nsw.edu.au/page/faq>>

# VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

## KEY POINTS

- ▶ Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools participate in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses at a slightly higher rate (34%) than non-Aboriginal students (31%).
- ▶ While both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools select similar VET courses, the completion rate for non-Aboriginal students is slightly higher – 74% compared to 66% where the Full Certificate is available.

An outcome of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is “*Students reach their full potential through further education pathways*”, with the stated target “*By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%*”<sup>1</sup>.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Students in NSW have the option of studying VET courses at school or through TAFE NSW or other training providers.<sup>2</sup> For NSW school students, VET is 'dual-accredited'. Students receive recognition towards their school qualification (e.g., HSC), as well as a nationally recognised VET qualification (e.g., Certificate II). Year 11/12 students typically take a 'Stage 6' VET Course, with the most common qualification being a Certificate II.<sup>3</sup>

## VET PARTICIPATION

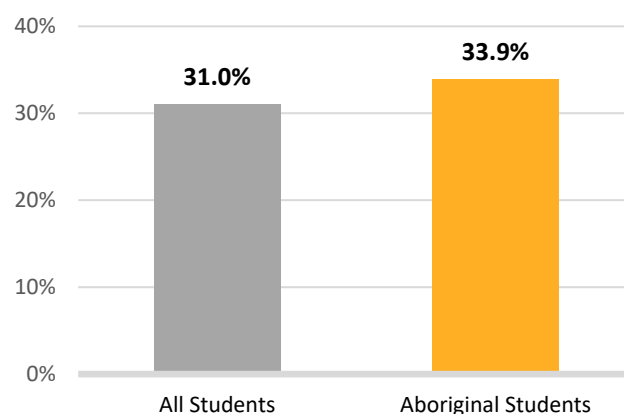
In 2021, over 11,000 Year 11 and 12 students in NSW Catholic schools (including RI/MPJP schools) participated in VET courses in school.<sup>4</sup> This is estimated to make up around 31% of the cohort of Year 11 and 12 students. This is similar to the 30% recorded for Government schools, and much higher than the 13% for Independent schools.<sup>5</sup>

Within NSW Catholic schools, the estimated VET participation rate of 34% for Aboriginal students is slightly higher than the total of 31% for all students.

Due to data limitations, it was not possible to compare the Aboriginal student participation rate across sectors.

FIGURE 25

ESTIMATED % OF YEAR 11/12 CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TAKING VET COURSES - 2021



Source: NCVET DataBuilder 2021, ACARA MySchool 2021

<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>>

<sup>2</sup> NESA (2022), 'Vocational Education and Training: Stage 6', <<https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/vet>>

<sup>3</sup> Certificates I and III are also present. Note the *Australian Qualifications Framework* (AQF) qualification 'hierarchy' is, in ascending order: *Certificate I, Certificate II, Certificate III, Certificate IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma*.

<sup>4</sup> NCVET (2021), 'DataBuilder', <<https://www.ncvet.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder#vis-students>>

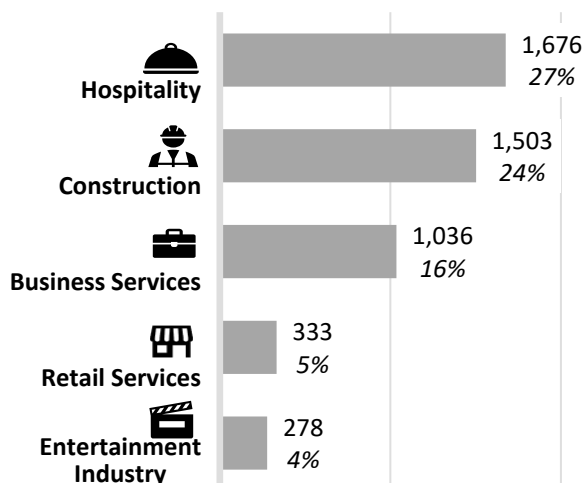
<sup>5</sup> Figures calculated per sector by dividing total VET students (from NCVET DataBuilder) by total Year 11/12 students (from ACARA MySchool 2021).

## VET COURSES SELECTED

The three most common VET courses in NSW Catholic schools for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are Hospitality, Construction, and Business Services in 2022. These courses comprise 67% of VET course selections for non-Aboriginal students and 61% of VET course selections for Aboriginal students.

FIGURE 26

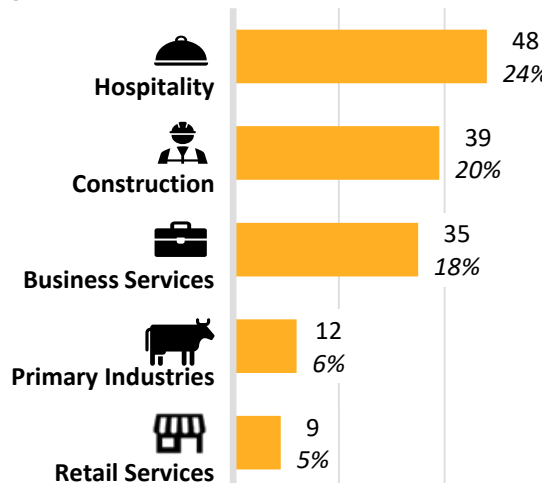
TOP 5 MOST COMMON VET COURSES FOR NON-ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, 2022



Source: NESAs VCS Online 2022

FIGURE 27

TOP 5 MOST COMMON VET COURSES FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, 2022



Source: NESAs VCS Online 2022

## VET COMPLETION

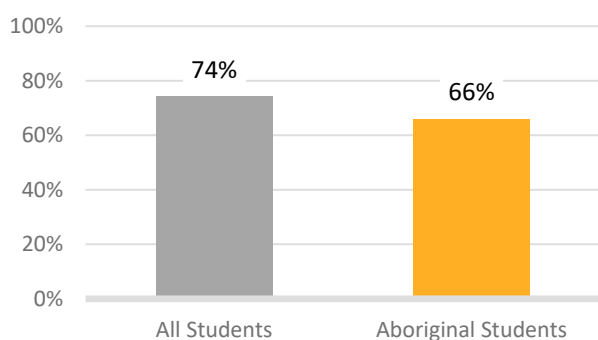
Students vary in the proportion of the VET qualification they complete while at school. Most commonly, they complete the 'Full Certificate', which is the nationally recognised qualification for entry level work in a particular industry. However, many only partially complete a qualification in Year 12. The reasons for this vary, though often it is due to course structure including students undertaking a short course to meet HSC requirements, or in the case of apprenticeships, further training and final assessment are arranged to be completed post-school with a second RTO (Registered Training Organisation), such as TAFE.

It is worth noting that Catholic school sector RTOs have the most advanced VET completion rates, representing 37.0% of all VET Delivered to Secondary Student program completions in NSW.

Where a Full Certificate is available, around 74% of all students achieve it in Catholic schools, compared to 66% of Aboriginal students in Catholic schools. Where a Full Certificate is not available, around 76% of the students in Catholic schools achieve all units, compared to 79% of Aboriginal students in Catholic schools.

FIGURE 28

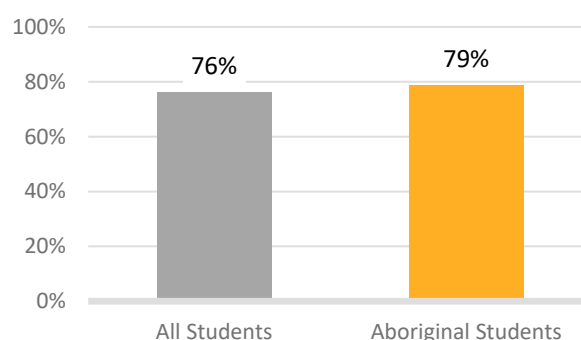
% OF NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOL VET STUDENTS AWARDED **FULL CERTIFICATE** WHERE AVAILABLE, 2022



Source: NSW VET Working Group data, 2022

FIGURE 29

% OF NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOL VET STUDENTS AWARDED **ALL UNITS** WHERE FULL CERTIFICATE NOT AVAILABLE, 2022



Source: NSW VET Working Group data, 2022



## POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

Each year, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (a NSW Government department) conducts a survey assessing the post-school destinations and experiences of former NSW school students. The survey has two cohorts: students who completed Year 12 in the year prior to the survey (“Year 12 Completers”) and students who left school before completing Year 12 in the year prior to the survey (“Early School Leavers”).<sup>1</sup>

Typically, this report breaks down certain statistics by sector, i.e., Government, Catholic and Independent. However, when it comes to summarising the results for Aboriginal students, sector data is not provided due to small sample sizes. In 2021, 1,251 Aboriginal Year 12 completers and 690 Aboriginal early school leavers completed the survey. Note that the most recently available data is for the calendar year 2021.

The following information summarises CESE’s survey results of Aboriginal students at the NSW state level only.

In 2021, 81% of Aboriginal Year 12 completers (*Figure 30*) and 70% of Aboriginal early school leavers (*Figure 31*) were in education, training, or employment. This compares to 94% and 84% of non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers and early school leavers respectively. This represents an improvement on 2020, when 80% of Aboriginal Year 12 completers and 63% of Aboriginal early school leavers were in education, training, or employment.

FIGURE 30

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS OF YEAR 12 COMPLETERS - NSW, 2021

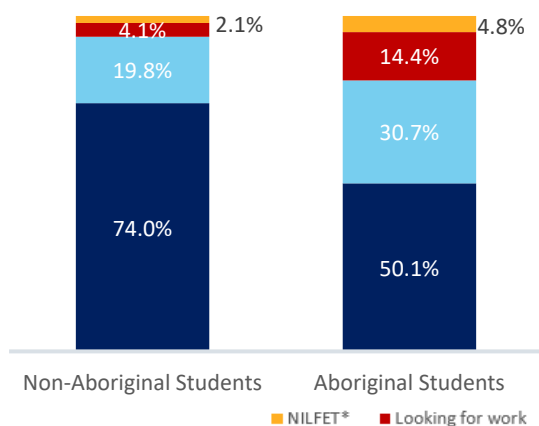
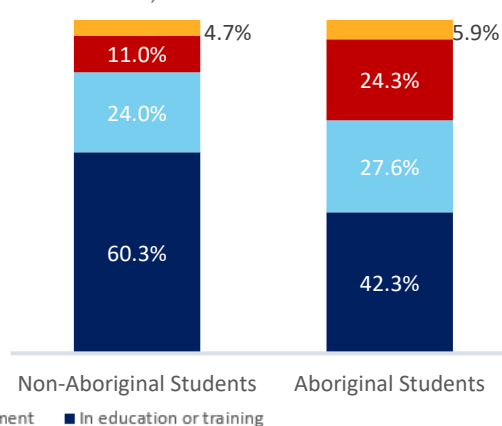


FIGURE 31

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS - NSW, 2021



Source: NSW DoE 2021 Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey. \*NILFET means not in the labour force, education or training.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/cese/publications/research-reports/nsw-post-school-destinations-and-experiences-survey>>

For Year 12 Completers, since 2014 there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students enrolled in Education or Training after leaving school, mostly offset by the increase in the proportion of Aboriginal students in full-time or part-time work (refer to *Figure 32*).

In 2021, 27.6% of Aboriginal early school leavers were engaged in full-time (9.0%) or part-time (18.6%) work, up from just 14.5% in 2014. As a result, in 2021, there were 15.6% fewer Aboriginal early school leavers looking for work or not in the labour force, education or training (NILFET) (refer to *Figure 33*).

FIGURE 32

% OF ABORIGINAL **YEAR 12 COMPLETERS** IN EMPLOYMENT OR EDUCATION/TRAINING - NSW

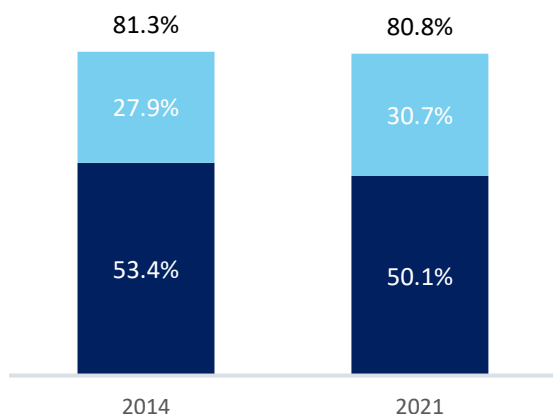
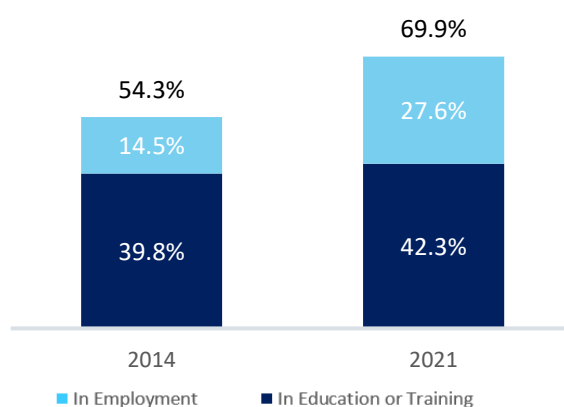


FIGURE 33

% OF ABORIGINAL **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS** IN EMPLOYMENT OR EDUCATION/TRAINING - NSW



Source: NSW DoE 2021 Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey.

Table 4 below shows the top 5 areas of education entered post-school in 2021 for Aboriginal students.

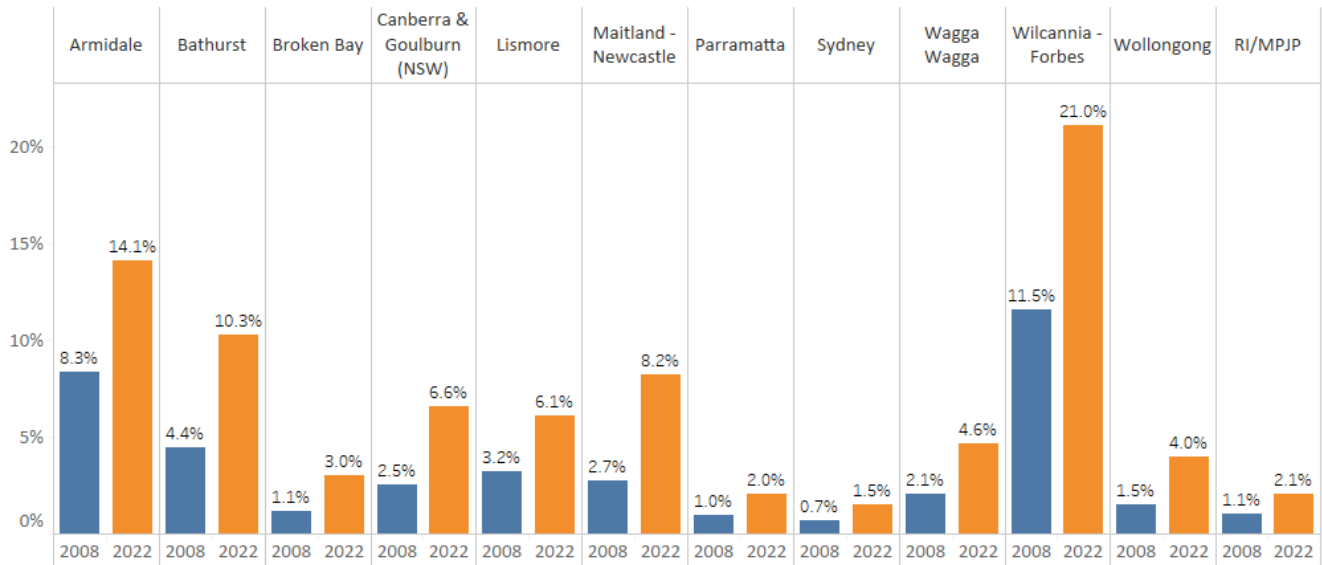
TABLE 4

TOP 5 AREAS OF EDUCATION ENTERED INTO POST-SCHOOL, 2021	
Aboriginal Year 12 Completers	Aboriginal Early School Leavers
1. Teacher education	1. Building
2. Nursing	2. Personal services (includes beauty therapy and/or hairdressing)
3. Human welfare studies and services	3. Human welfare studies and services
4. Business management	4. Food and hospitality
5. Building	5. Automotive engineering and technology

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

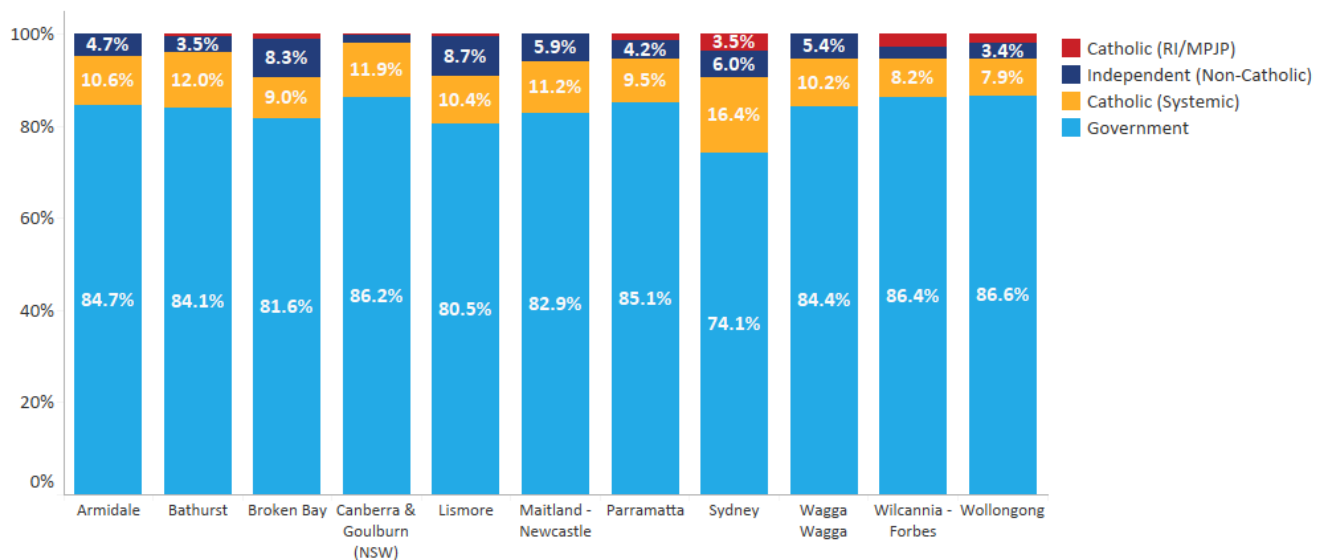
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT BY CATHOLIC SCHOOL AGENCY, 2008 VS 2022



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets

## APPENDIX 2

PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY SECTOR BY DIOCESE - NSW SCHOOLS, 2022



Source: ACARA MySchool datasets.

