



2024 ANNUAL REPORT
ABORIGINAL EDUCATION
OUTCOMES
IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

October 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

Catholic schools in NSW currently educate approximately 11,400 Aboriginal students, more than at any other time in the sector’s 204-year history. The sector also employs almost 800 Aboriginal teachers, teaching assistants, community engagement officers and other non-teaching staff.

This is the third annual report on Aboriginal Education Outcomes in NSW Catholic Schools. The 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 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, and collect and share best practice case studies from across the system. This is in response to CSNSW’s constitutional requirements.

Key policy documents and reports are 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council)
- v. The National Report on Schooling in Australia (ACARA)
- vi. 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;
- NAPLAN;
- HSC; and
- VET and post-school destinations.

Reporting on metrics from the AEDC is covered every third year following the data release.

Note that data used for reporting on Aboriginal people can have certain limitations, as the person must 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 interpreting the data.

When this report refers to NSW Catholic schools, it may refer 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.

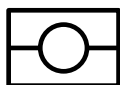
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 to 12.0% in 2023.
- ▶ Since 2008, the proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools has increased from 1.7% to 4.0% in 2023, 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.
- ▶ Aboriginal language courses are available for students, and professional learning for staff to increase cultural competency and responsiveness to our students and their families.
- ▶ Attendance rates for Aboriginal students at Catholic schools are higher than for Government and Independent schools. In line with all students across all sectors, attendance rebounded strongly in 2023 for Aboriginal students.
- ▶ The attendance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Catholic school students is also smaller than in Government and Independent schools. In 2023, the Catholic school gap for attendance improved for the first time in 7 years.
- ▶ Retention rates for Aboriginal students are significantly higher in the Catholic sector than in other sectors.
- ▶ While average NAPLAN scores for Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools are below non-Aboriginal students, they are higher than the average scores for all Aboriginal students in NSW across all domains in Year 5 and Year 9.
- ▶ The proportion of systemic Catholic school Aboriginal students sitting NAPLAN that are in the *Developing* proficiency level or above is at least 84% in Year 5 across the five domains. In Year 9, this figure is 82%. For non-Aboriginal students, these figures for Year 5 and Year 9 are 94% and 92% respectively.
- ▶ There are gaps across the *Exceeding* and *Needs Additional Support* proficiency levels between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. However, these gaps are smaller across a range of domains when compared to all Aboriginal students in NSW.
- ▶ Over the past five years, the median ATAR for Aboriginal students has averaged approximately 10 points lower than that for non-Aboriginal students, ranging from 58.8 to 62.0. In 2023, the gap in median ATAR in systemic Catholic schools closed slightly to 9.9 (70.7 vs 60.8).
- ▶ The combined Bands 5 and 6 rates increased to 26.6% for Aboriginal students in 2023 compared to 38.7% for non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. In 2023, the gap of 12.1% was the smallest over the past five years.
- ▶ Aboriginal students take a higher proportion of PDHPE, technologies, creative arts and VET subjects compared to non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools.
- ▶ Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools participate in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses at a slightly higher rate (33.6%) than non-Aboriginal students (32%).
- ▶ Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools select similar courses for their top 5 choices. In 2023, the completion rate is slightly higher for Aboriginal HSC students at 83%, compared to 82% for non-Aboriginal students where the full certificate is available. This figure is 73% for Aboriginal HSC students in Catholic schools achieving a Certificate III, where available.
- ▶ Although there is no sector breakdown, the overall rate of Aboriginal school leavers in NSW either in employment or education/training has increased to 83.9% for school completers and 74.5% for early school leavers in 2022.

AT A GLANCE



11,462
STUDENTS



794
SCHOOLS STAFF

ATSI* students at schools	ATSI students	% of total students
PRIMARY	6,296	4.7%
SECONDARY	5,166	3.7%
SYSTEMIC	10,502	4.5%
RI/MPJP	960	2.4%
BOARDING [^]	239	11.5%
FEMALE	5,833	4.3%
MALE	5,627	4.1%
ESL	286	0.8%
NCCD	3,685	6.5%

ATSI staff at schools [#]	ATSI staff	% of total staff
TEACHING STAFF	291	1.3%
NON-TEACHING STAFF	503	4.9%
Staff at schools	ATSI staff	Other staff
FULL-TIME	44%	56%
PART-TIME	56%	44%
FEMALE	65%	79%
MALE	35%	21%
CATHOLIC	57%	71%
NON-CATHOLIC	43%	29%

ATSI students at schools	ATSI students	Other students
CATHOLIC	49%	63%
NO RELIGION	19%	10%
OTHER FAITH	17%	11%
OTHER CHRISTIAN	14%	11%
ORTHODOX	1%	5%

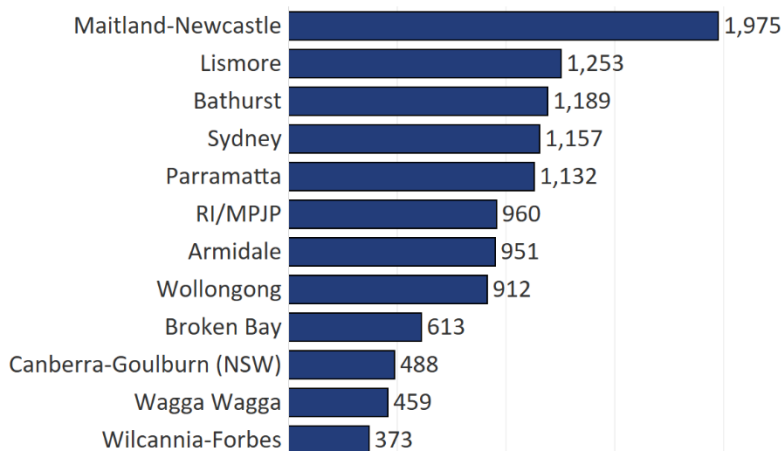
Teaching staff at schools	ATSI staff	Other staff
TEACHERS	82%	69%
COORDINATORS	11%	22%
ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS	1%	3%
PRINCIPALS	1%	3%
RE COORDINATORS	3%	2%
LIBRARIANS	1%	1%

ATSI students at schools	ATSI students	Share of total ATSI students
MAJOR CITIES	5,475	48%
REMOTE & REGIONAL	5,987	52%

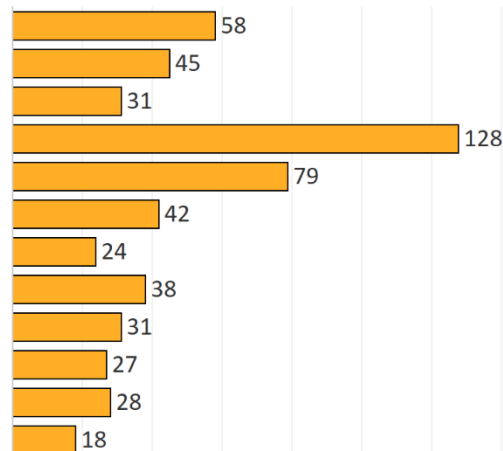


Schools with ATSI students	ATSI students	% of schools with ATSI students
MAJOR CITIES	350	90%
REMOTE & REGIONAL	199	99%

ATSI STUDENTS



SCHOOLS WITH ATSI STUDENTS



*ATSI – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Sources: CSNSW Census February 2024 at 15 May 2024 for systemic and RI/MPJP schools, ACARA MySchool data 2023 for Geolocation, AGDoE August Census 2023 for NCCD. | Notes: [^]Boarding figures shown are included in the systemic and RI/MPJP student counts. [#]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-2024 has been used for 4 RI/MPJP schools where 2024 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.

ABORIGINALITY IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Catholic schools have enrolled an increasing share of Aboriginal students in NSW, up from 9.5% in 2008 to 12.0% in 2023.
- ▶ Since 2008, the proportion of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools has increased from 1.7% to 4.0% in 2023, 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.
- ▶ Aboriginal language courses are available for students, and professional learning for staff to increase cultural competency and responsiveness to our students and their families.

ENROLMENTS

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 2023) may partly be attributed to an increase in 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 2023.

In 2023, NSW Catholic schools educated 10,694 Aboriginal students (2008: 4,086 students). These students comprise 4.0% of the sector’s cohort (4.3% for systemic and 2.6% 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*, this upward trend in Aboriginal enrolments reflects the state as a whole, where the Aboriginal proportion of students increased from 3.9% in 2008 to 7.1% in 2023. Details by dioceses are provided in *Appendix 1*.

FIGURE 1

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT - ALL NSW SCHOOLS, 2008-23

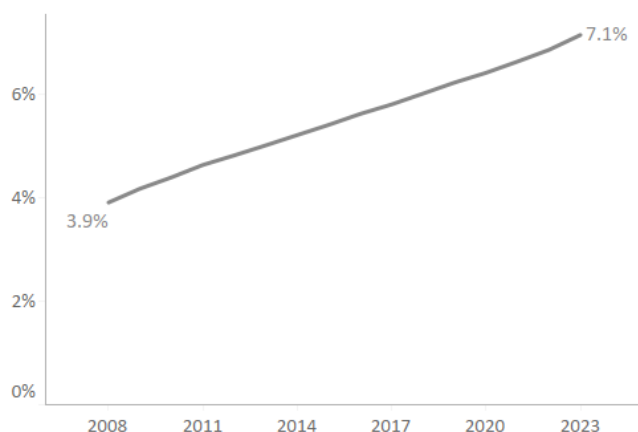
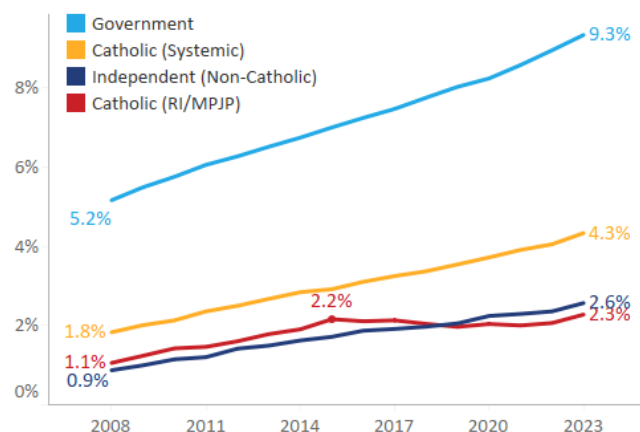


FIGURE 2

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT - NSW SCHOOLS BY SECTOR, 2008-23



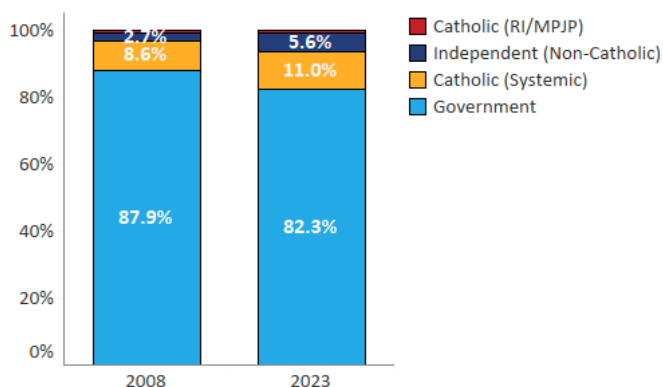
Source: ACARA MySchool datasets

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 12.0% in 2023 (11.0% for systemic and 1.0% for RI/MPJP).

The 11.0% share of NSW’s Aboriginal students attending systemic Catholic schools in 2023 is the highest in the sector’s history. However, the share of Aboriginal students for RI/MPJP schools peaked at 1.3% in 2015. (Refer Figure 3)

The proportion of NSW Aboriginal students attending Independent schools has increased consistently from 2.7% in 2008 to 5.6% in 2023.

FIGURE 3
PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY SECTOR - NSW SCHOOLS, 2008 vs 2023



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets

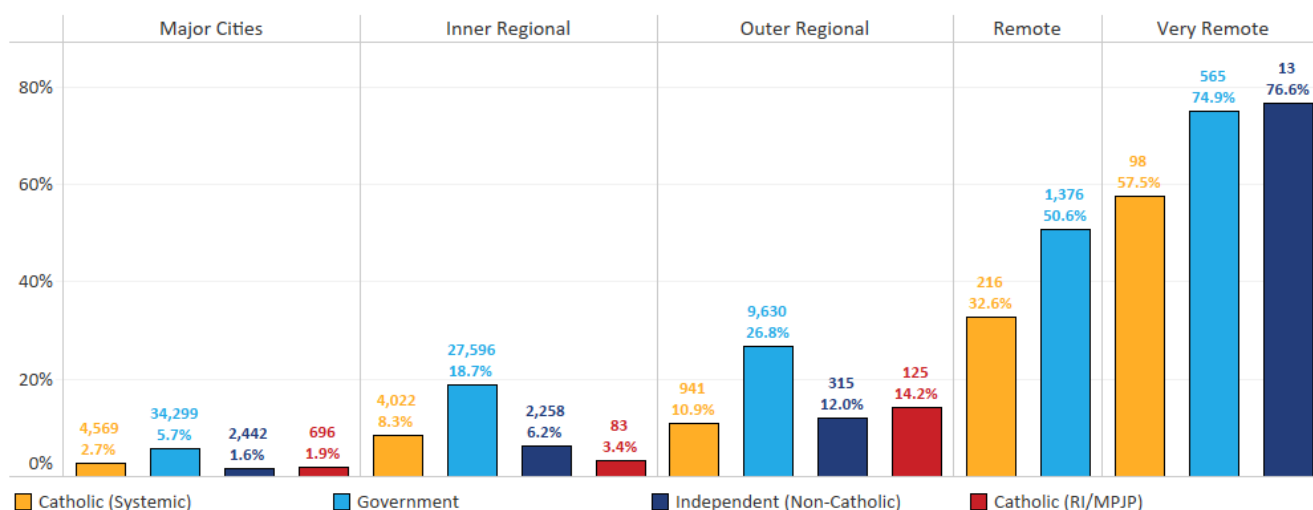
The increases within Catholic and Independent schools have been offset by a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students attending Government schools. For details by diocese, refer to Appendix 2.

GEOLOCATION

In 2023, 4.4% of students in Major City schools in NSW identified as Aboriginal, whereas the rate was 3.7x higher in Regional and Remote schools across all sectors, at 16.4%. (Geolocation categories are per the ABS and were updated in 2023).

Figure 4 shows Aboriginal students by geolocation of their school. In 2023, there were 42.0k Aboriginal students in Major city schools and 47.2k in Regional and Remote schools. As shown below, the proportion of Aboriginal students in a school increases with the school’s remoteness, Systemic Catholic schools remain the primary alternative to Government schools for Aboriginal students located outside of major cities.

FIGURE 4
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY GEOLOCATION - NSW SCHOOLS, 2023
% OF COHORT AND STUDENT NUMBERS



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets.

BOARDING STUDENTS

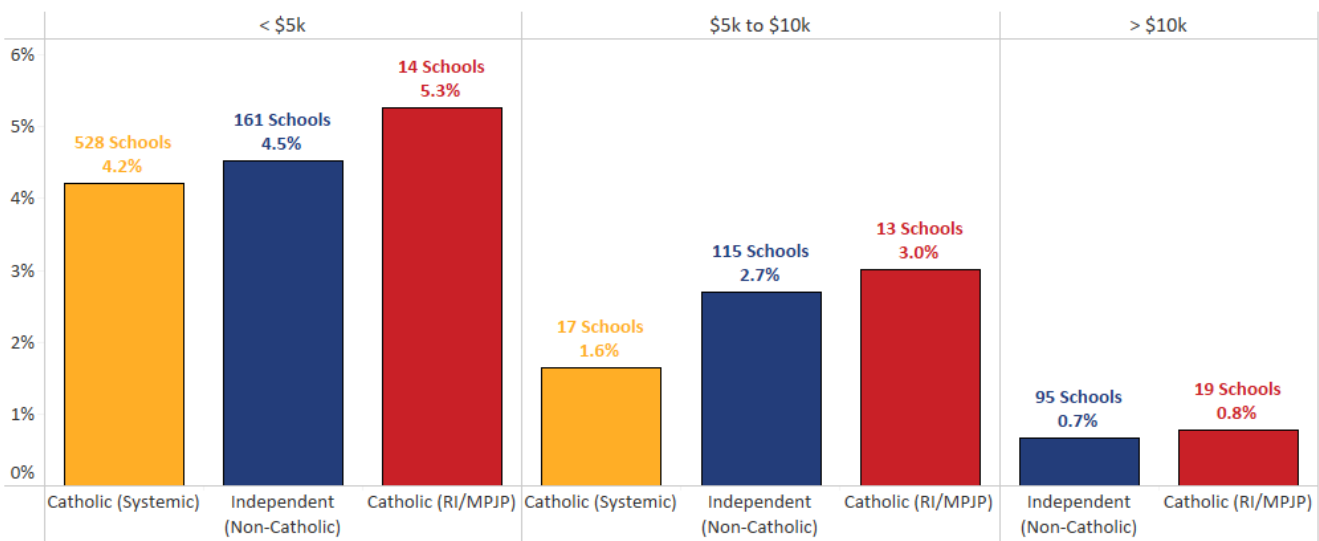
In 2023, Aboriginal students boarding in Catholic schools made up 10.5% of total boarders. Nine Aboriginal boarding students attending a systemic boarding school in Wagga Wagga, representing 3.3% of all systemic Catholic school boarding students in NSW. In 2023, there were a total of 209 Aboriginal boarding students across 11 RI/MPJP boarding schools, representing 11.6% of all RI/MPJP school boarding students. Of all Aboriginal students attending an RI/MPJP school, almost 1 in 4 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 17 systemic Catholic schools fall into this fee range, this suggests the overall higher percentage of Aboriginal students in all systemic Catholic schools (4.3% per *Figure 2*), compared to Independent and RI/MPJP schools (2.6% and 2.3% respectively per *Figure 2*), may be more to do with the level of school fees than other differentiating factors.

In 2023, although Aboriginal students as a percentage of the total sector cohort was lowest in RI/MPJP schools, *Figure 5* shows that when viewed across certain fee ranges (<\$5k, \$5 to \$10k, >\$10k), a higher proportion of Aboriginal students attend RI/MPJP schools in each of the ranges.

FIGURE 5
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AS % OF COHORT BY FEE RANGE, 2022



Source: ACARA MySchool datasets. Note that 2022 is the most recent available Finance data.

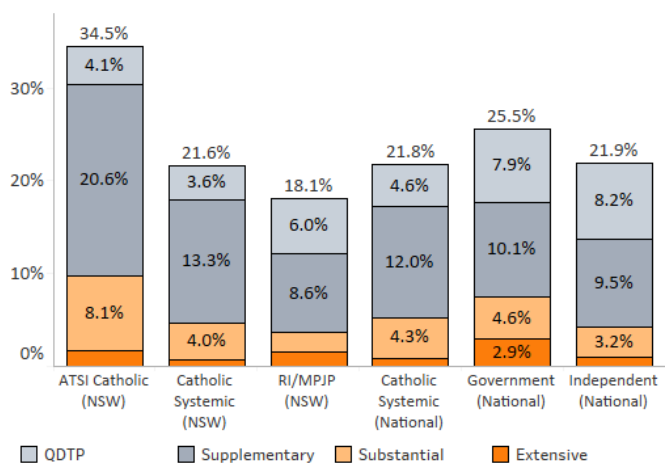
NCCD STUDENTS

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 2023, 34.5% of Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools are reported as having a level of adjustment under the NCCD categorisation. This compares to rates of 21.6% and 18.1% of the total student population in NSW systemic Catholic and RI/MPJP schools, respectively.

Comparisons to the Government and Independent sectors (all students) are only available at the national level, 25.5% and 21.9% respectively.

The main contributors to the variance are largely driven by greater levels of Aboriginal students reported in the Supplementary (20.6%) and Substantial (8.1%) categories in NSW Catholic schools.

FIGURE 6
NCCD BY SECTOR, 2023



Source: ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia; August Census 2023.
Notes: NCCD comparative sector data only available at the national level. National level data includes RI/MPJP as part of 'Independent'.

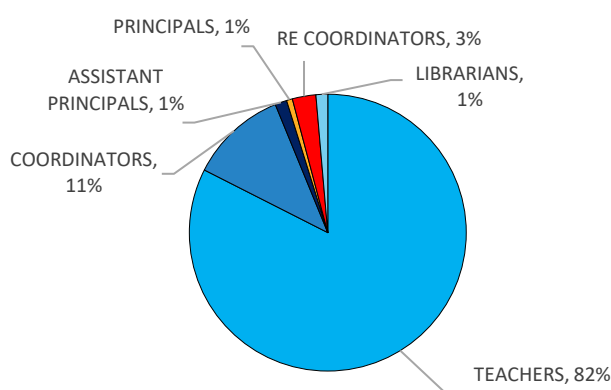
STAFF

With only 1.3% of Teaching staff identifying as Aboriginal (CSNSW Census February 2024), 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 4.9%. 'Non-Teaching staff' includes specialist support staff, teacher's aides, administrative staff, building operations and other service staff.

Aboriginal staff are under-represented in principal and assistant principal roles in schools. In the non-Aboriginal staff population, 3% of teaching staff are principals, and 3% are assistant principals. While 1% of principals and 1% of assistant principals identify 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, 2024



Source: CSNSW February Census 2024

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Through CSNSW's Professional Learning platform, staff are offered the opportunity to increase their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency, bringing these perspectives into the curriculum and improving awareness of First Nations histories. Also offered are on-country experiences, conferences and networking meetings to allow participants to develop their understanding further, build skills, and learn from others. A key training offered is the *Crossing Cultures Hidden Histories* course, with over 600 participants to date. The triennial *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Conference* has attracted over 2,300 participants since starting in 2004. Other courses offered have included *Building Leadership in Aboriginal Education Across Catholic Schools*, *Trauma Informed Practice* and *Foundations for Learning – Aboriginal Students*.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

The 2024 rollout of the new K-10 Aboriginal Language Syllabus in NSW will support the language aspirations of Aboriginal students and their families and communities. CSNSW has commissioned a report *Let's Talk The Language Again*¹ to show its continued support for students being able to communicate in an Aboriginal language. Studying an Aboriginal language also gives students the opportunity to understand the relationship between language, country and culture. There are approximately 35 Aboriginal languages in NSW. In systemic Catholic schools across four dioceses, there are currently six languages with courses or materials (e.g. dictionary) available to our students. These languages include Wiradjuri, Gamilaraay and Wayilwan (Bathurst Diocese), Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay (Armidale Diocese), Gumbaynggirr (Lismore Diocese), and Gathang (Maitland-Newcastle Diocese).

¹ [Let's Talk The Language Again Report](#)

ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Attendance rates for Aboriginal students at Catholic schools are higher than for Government and Independent schools. In line with all students across all sectors, attendance rebounded strongly in 2023 for Aboriginal students.
- ▶ The attendance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Catholic school students is also smaller than in Government and Independent schools. In 2023, the Catholic school gap for attendance improved for the first time in 7 years.
- ▶ Retention rates for Aboriginal students are significantly higher in the Catholic sector than other sectors.

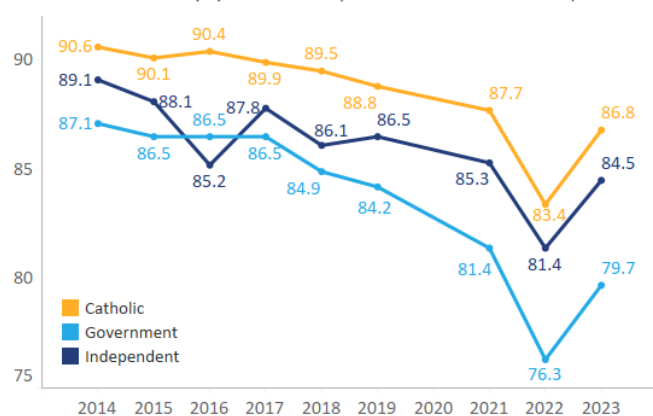
The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 identified Attendance as a priority area. Retention rates are critical to meet the National Agreement on Closing the Gap outcome: “Students achieve their full learning potential”, with the target “By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96%”.

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 know 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.

ATTENDANCE RATE

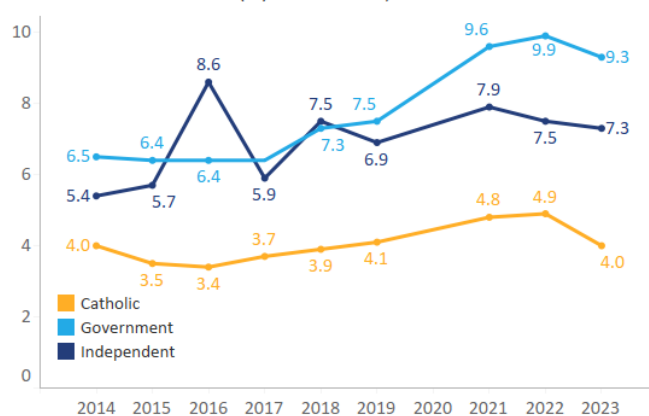
In 2022, attendance rates reached a historical low for all students, being severely impacted by health advice related to Covid, families removing children from school for international travel, flooding disasters in NSW and the increasing prevalence of school refusal. Although not back to pre-Covid levels, attendance rates in 2023 have reversed the trend and rebounded healthily for all students and all sectors. In 2023, the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools reached 86.8%, maintaining higher attendance rates for Aboriginal students than Independent and Government schools. (Refer Figure 8)

FIGURE 8
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 9
ATTENDANCE RATE GAP (%): YEARS 1-10, NSW



RI/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.

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance rates remains significantly smaller for Catholic schools than in other school sectors. In 2023, the gap for the Catholic sector was 4.0%, falling for the first time in five years. (Refer to *Figure 9*)

ATTENDANCE LEVEL

Attendance level is the proportion of full-time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is at least 90%. Attendance levels show a similar pattern to attendance rates, with a long-term decline, reaching its lowest level in 2022 and rebounding in 2023. Aboriginal students in Catholic schools have the highest attendance level across sectors at 49.7%, but this still represents a significant gap of 16.9% with non-Aboriginal students. (Refer to *Figures 10 and 11*)

FIGURE 10

ATTENDANCE LEVEL (%): YEARS 1-10, ABORIGINAL STUDENTS, NSW

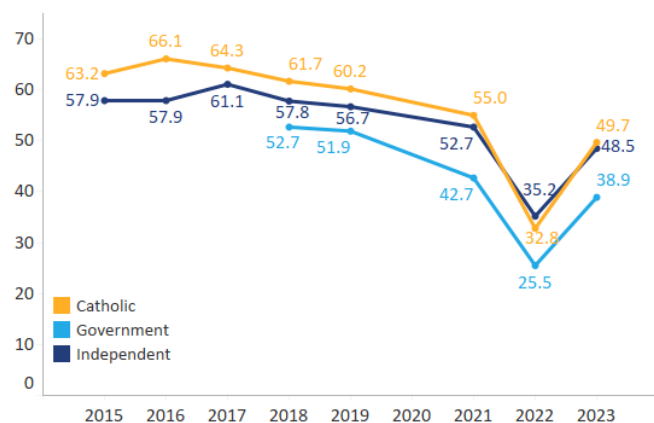
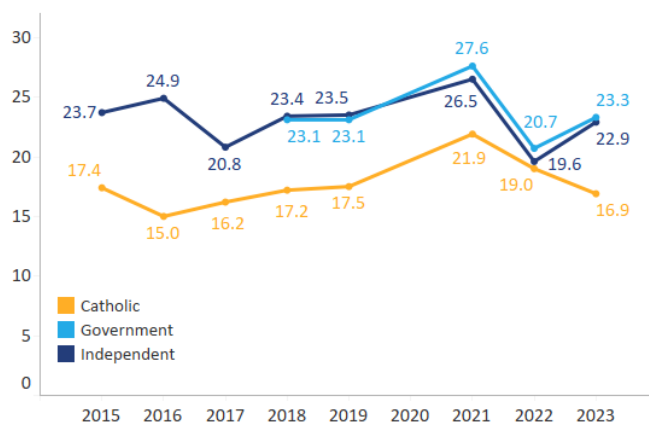


FIGURE 11

ATTENDANCE LEVEL GAP (%): YEARS 1-10, NSW



Source: ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia.

Notes: 'Attendance Level' is the proportion of full-time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is at least 90%. 'Attendance Level Gap' is defined as the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance levels.

Notes continued: Data for 2020 not available due to Covid-19 pandemic. 2021 data in NSW not comparable with prior years due to changes in attendance calculations by ACARA. Data not collected for NSW government schools prior to 2018. RI/MPJP Catholic schools are counted as Catholic rather than as Independent.

RETENTION RATES

Figure 12 shows the retention rate between Year 10 and Year 12, that is, the proportion of the Year 10 cohort who go on to complete Year 12.

FIGURE 12

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

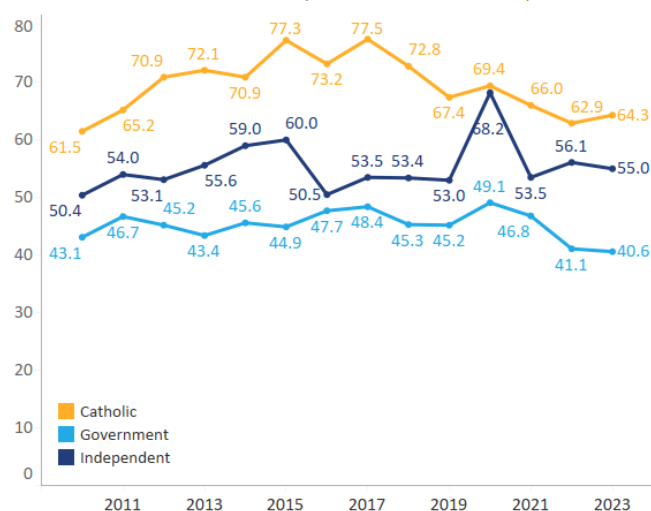
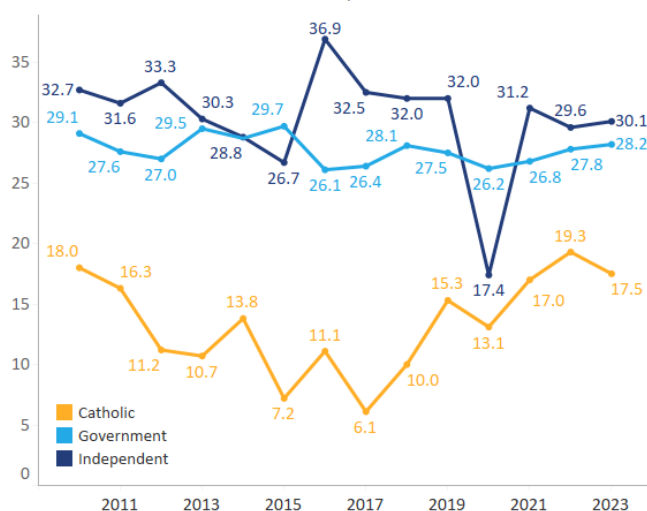


FIGURE 13

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. Overall, it is estimated that the impacts of COVID-19 on the data were minor.

In 2023, the retention rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools was 64.3%. The retention rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools from Year 10 to Year 12 remains above the rate in Independent and Government schools. The Catholic sector showed a slight improvement in the retention rate in 2023, compared with the other sectors, which declined slightly. However, the retention rate remains far below its peak in 2017.

Similar to the attendance rate trend, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal retention rates remains significantly smaller for Catholic schools. *Figure 13* shows that in 2023, the gap is 17.5%, falling slightly from last year.

The retention rate for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools from Year 7/8 to Year 10 is 99.2%, indicating almost all students enrolled in high school reach their final full year of school before they can legally leave. The Year 10 to Year 11 retention rate is 74.6% for Aboriginal students in Catholic schools, around 10% higher than the Year 10 to Year 12 rate. In term 3 of Year 11, or when they turn 17, students can leave school without a pathway. Students electing an alternate pathway are more likely to leave at the end of Year 11 or early Year 12.¹ Refer to VET & Post-school Destinations section of the report for further information on students who leave school early.

¹ NSW Department of Education “*Historical Retention Rate Aboriginal Students - Y12 2018 to Y12 2020*”

NAPLAN PERFORMANCE

KEY POINTS

- ▶ While NAPLAN average scores for Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools are below non-Aboriginal students, they are higher than the average scores for all Aboriginal students in NSW across all domains in Year 5 and Year 9.
- ▶ The proportion of systemic Catholic school Aboriginal students sitting NAPLAN that are in the *Developing* proficiency level or above is at least 84% in Year 5 across the five domains. In Year 9, this figure is 82%. For non-Aboriginal students, these figures for Year 5 and Year 9 are 94% and 92%, respectively.
- ▶ There are gaps across the *Exceeding* and *Needs Additional Support* proficiency levels between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. However, these gaps are smaller across a range of domains when compared to all Aboriginal students in NSW.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 identified Literacy and Numeracy as a priority area. 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 attainment¹.

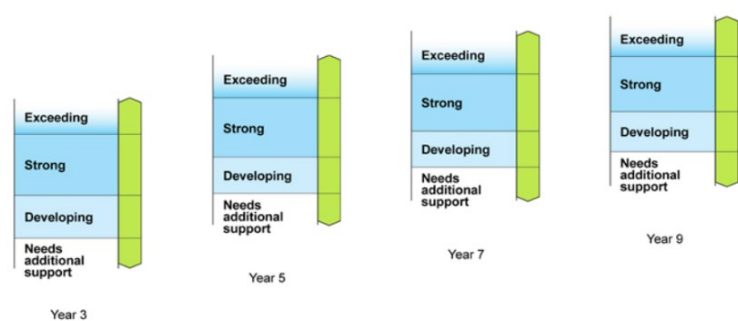
The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test is an annual assessment for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It covers five domains: Numeracy, Reading, Spelling, Grammar & Punctuation, and Writing. NAPLAN is the only national assessment that all Australian children undertake and provides comparable data about student performance in literacy and numeracy.

CHANGES IN 2023

From 2023 onwards, student achievement is now reported against proficiency standards on a new NAPLAN measurement scale. This replaces the “band” methodology used in prior years. The proficiency levels are defined below. The diagram illustrates the progression of proficiency levels from Year 3 to Year 9.

- **Exceeding** – the student’s result exceeds expectations at the time of testing.
- **Strong** – the student’s result meets challenging but reasonable expectations at the time of testing.
- **Developing** – the student’s result indicates that they are working towards expectations at the time of testing.
- **Needs additional support (NAS)** – the student’s result indicates that they are not achieving the learning outcomes that are expected at the time of testing. They are likely to need additional support to progress satisfactorily.

Diagram: NAPLAN measurement scales averaged across domains



Please refer to *Appendix 3* for further details on the changes to the timing and measurement of NAPLAN in 2023. Due to these changes, this report covers 2023 data only.

The previous NAPLAN reporting metric of the proportion of students in the “top two bands” has been replaced with the *Exceeding* proficiency level, and the “bottom two bands” with the *Needs Additional Support (NAS)*

¹ <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>; Outcome 5 Drivers

proficiency level. The “above minimum standards” concept was replaced with the concept of the proportion of students at least *Developing* or above proficiency level.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENT NAPLAN REPORTING

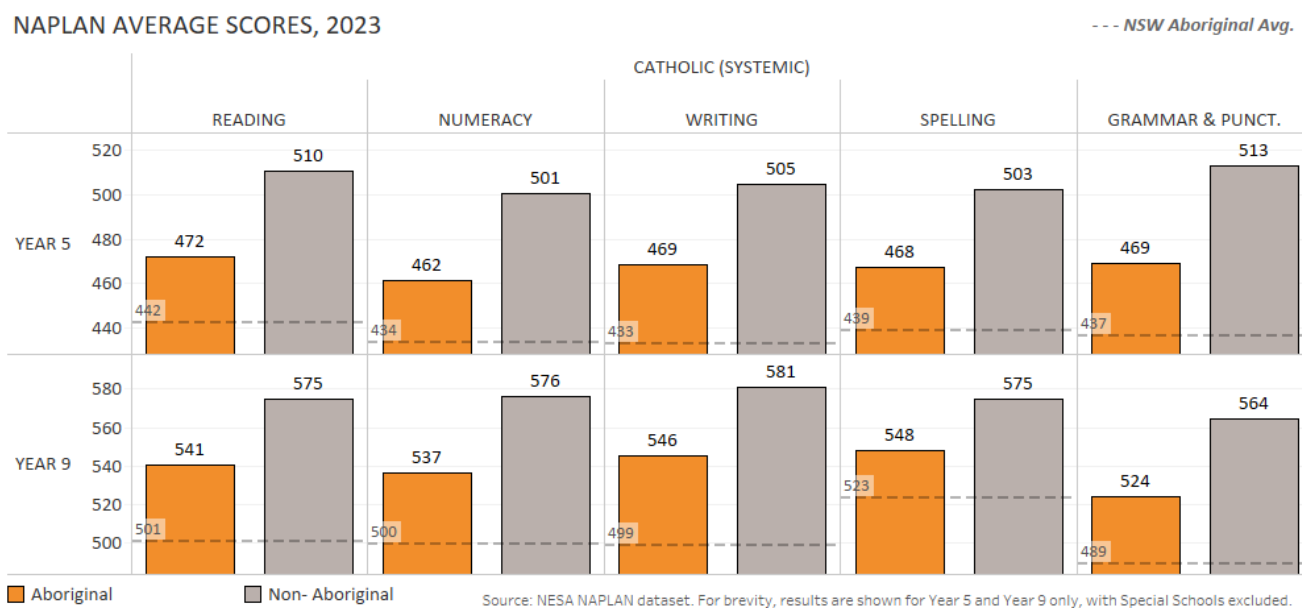
Analysis comparing NAPLAN performance between systemic Catholic school Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students should be treated with caution for two reasons:

1. The number of Aboriginal students sitting tests in each NAPLAN cohort is small¹. In 2023, the number of Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools sitting at least 1 NAPLAN test in each grade was 759 in Year 3, 717 in Year 5, 810 in Year 7, and 680 in Year 9.
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.

NAPLAN AVERAGE SCORES

Across all domains in systemic schools, there is a gap in average scores between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in both Year 5 and Year 9 test results. (Refer to *Figure 14*) The smallest gaps are in Spelling (35 in Year 5 and 27 in Year 9) and the largest gaps in Grammar & Punctuation (44 in Year 5 and 40 in Year 9). Compared with the average NAPLAN scores for Aboriginal students in all NSW sectors, the performance of Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools is stronger across all domains.

FIGURE 14



PROFICIENCY LEVELS

Figure 15 shows the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal systemic Catholic school students in each NAPLAN proficiency level by domain for Years 5 and 9. Aboriginal students have the most comparable proportion of students in the *Strong* proficiency level in Reading and Spelling in Year 5. In Year 9, the results are comparable for Spelling, however, they show more divergence across the other domains.

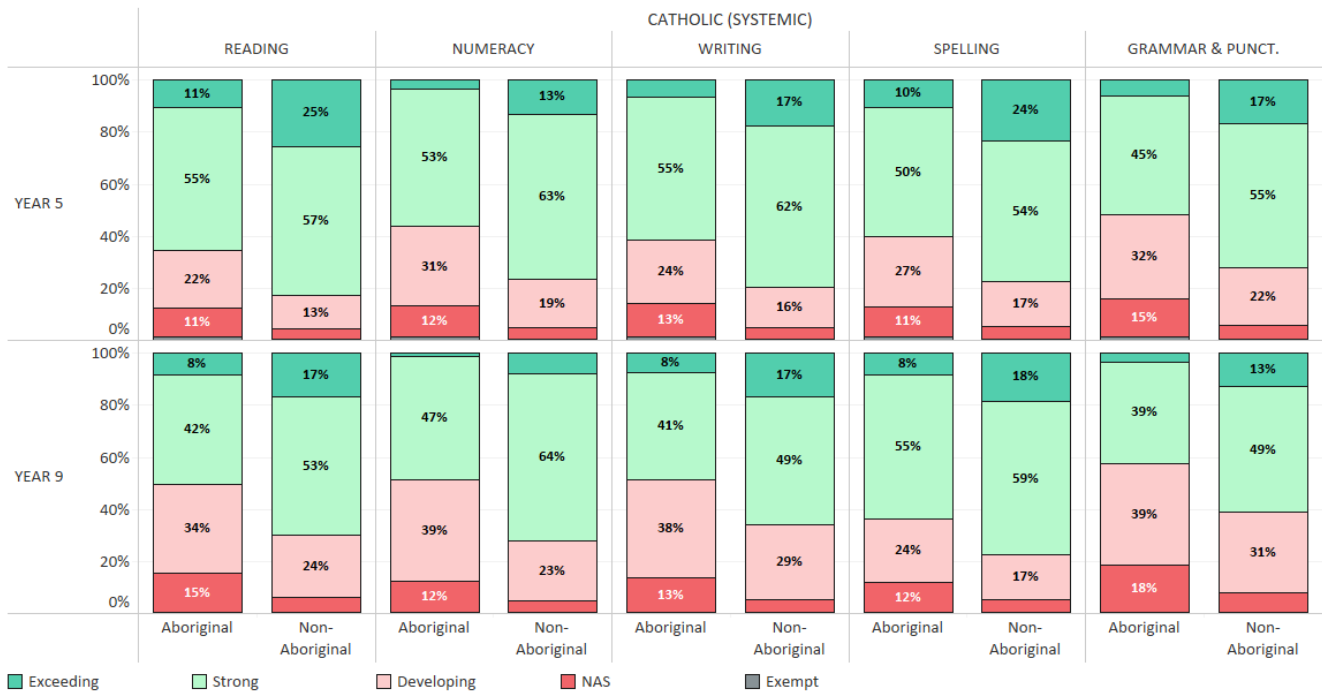
While there is no longer a “minimum standard” band for NAPLAN, the concept can be applied under the new proficiency standards by looking at the proportion of students above the *Needing Additional Support* level. Across all five domains, at least 84% of Year 5 Aboriginal students sitting NAPLAN in systemic Catholic schools are at least in the proficiency level *Developing* or above. In Year 9, this figure is 82%. For non-Aboriginal students,

¹ Includes Aboriginal students marked as “present” or sitting an “alternative format”.

these figures for Year 5 and Year 9 are 94% and 92%, respectively.

FIGURE 15

NAPLAN PROFICIENCY LEVELS, 2023



Source: NESA NAPLAN dataset. Notes: For brevity, results are shown for Year 5 and Year 9 only, with Special Schools excluded.

EXCEEDING PROFICIENCY LEVEL

The proportion of students in systemic Catholic schools in the *Exceeding* proficiency level is shown in Figure 16. There is a gap in the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students achieving the *Exceeding* level, with smaller gaps in Year 9 than Year 5 across all domains. (Refer to Figure 17) When comparing the gap between Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools and the gap at the NSW level, in Year 5 the gap is smaller in Numeracy, Writing and Spelling. In Year 9, the gap is smaller across all domains compared with the NSW average.

FIGURE 16

NAPLAN PROFICIENCY LEVEL %, 2023 ('EXCEEDING')

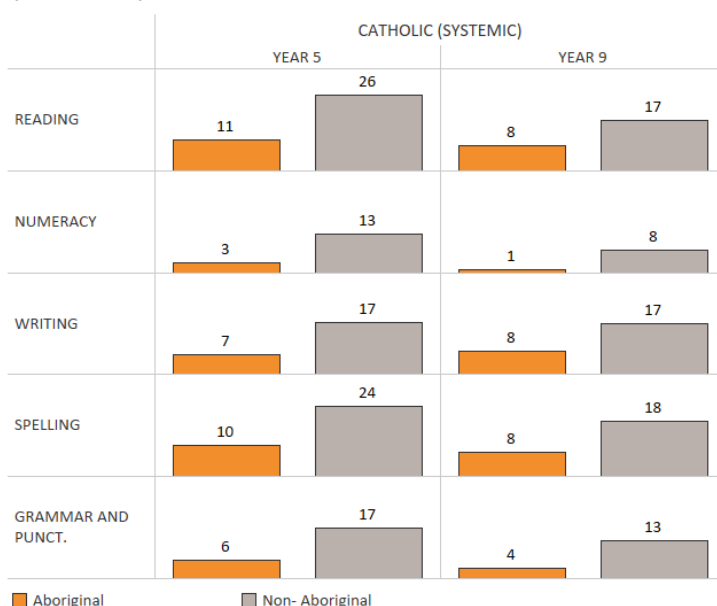
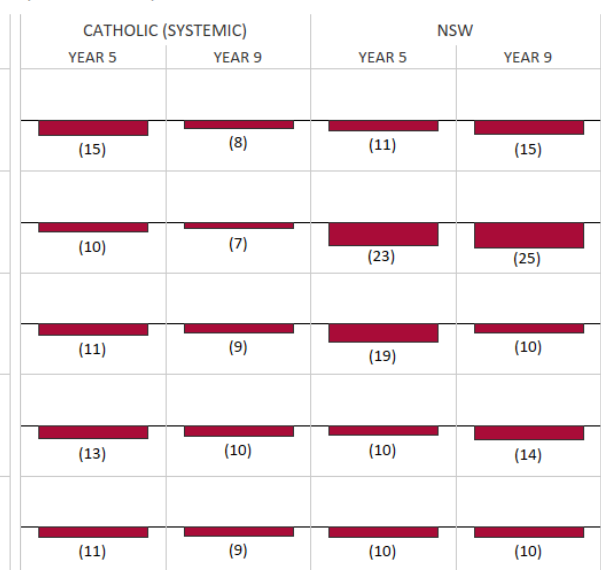


FIGURE 17

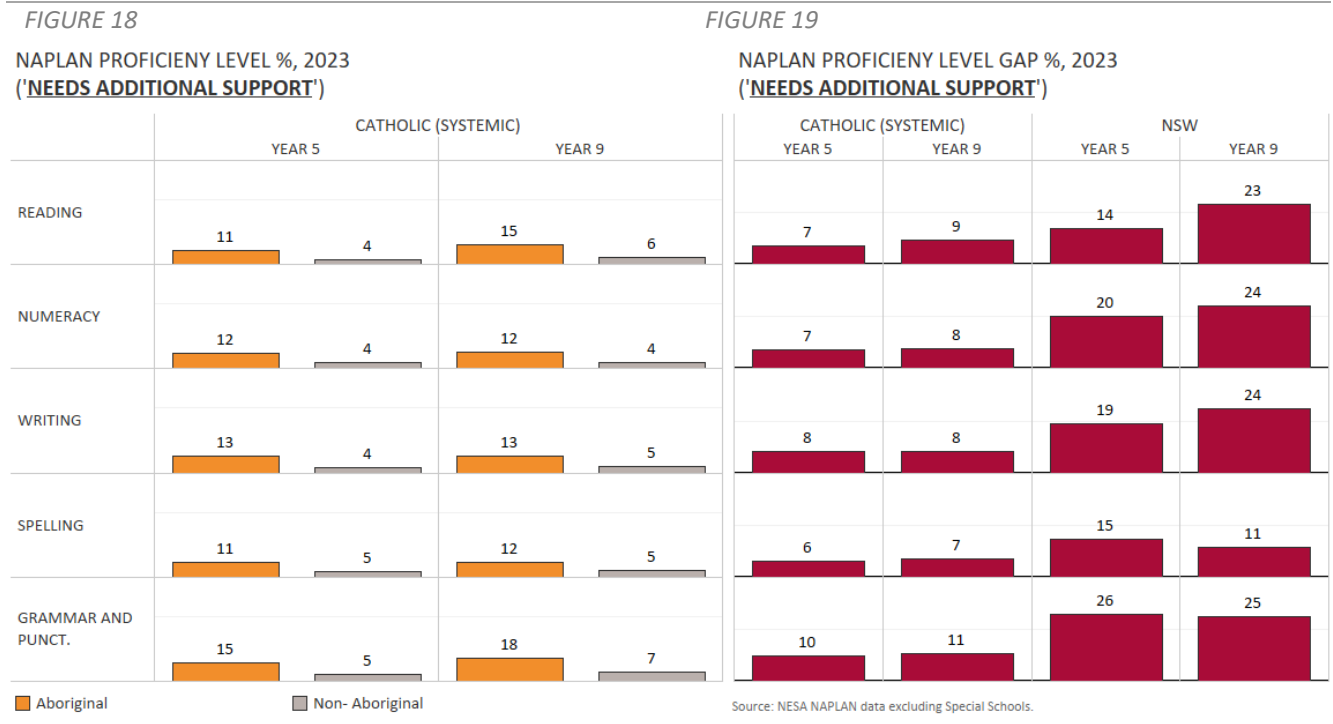
NAPLAN PROFICIENCY LEVEL GAP %, 2023 ('EXCEEDING')



Source: NESA NAPLAN dataset with Special Schools excluded.

NEEDS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROFICIENCY LEVEL

The proportion of Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools in the *Needs Additional Support (NAS)* level is higher than non-Aboriginal students across all domains in Year 5 and Year 9, as shown in *Figure 18*. The gaps are fairly consistent across all domains, except Grammar & Punctuation, which is 10% and 11% for Year 5 and Year 9, respectively. When comparing the gaps in systemic Catholic schools, these are significantly smaller than the NSW average gaps across all sectors. (Refer to *Figure 19*)



Refer to *Appendix 4* for all NAPLAN charts for the RI/MPJP schools.

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 58.8 to 62.0. In 2023, the gap in median ATAR in Catholic systemic schools closed slightly to 9.9 (70.7 vs 60.8).
- ▶ The combined Bands 5 and 6 rates increased to 26.6% in 2023 for Aboriginal students compared to 38.7% for non-Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools. In 2023, the gap of 12.1% was the smallest over the past five years.
- ▶ Aboriginal students take a higher proportion of PDHPE, technologies, creative arts and VET subjects compared to non-Aboriginal students.

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%”.

This section reports on HSC and ATAR trends in our systemic Catholic schools. Reporting on Aboriginal students requires that NESA records capture students’ identity information. For Year 12 systemic student records with NESA, approximately 1% in 2023 do not have any identification information.¹

HSC AND ATAR TRENDS

As shown in *Table 1*, 248 Aboriginal students in systemic schools were awarded their HSC in 2023. This represents 66% of Aboriginal students recorded in the August Census². Of these students, 167, or 67% were eligible for an ATAR, a similar result to 2022.

HSC awarded to Aboriginal students in 2020 has peaked in recent years. Covid-19 likely had a significant impact on school and HSC completions across this period.

The percentage of non-Aboriginal HSC students eligible for an ATAR in systemic Catholic schools remained at a similar level of 81% in 2023.

TABLE 1

Systemic Catholic Schools	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Aboriginal Students					
Awarded HSC	231	292	258	238	248
Eligible for ATAR	152	185	170	161	167
% Eligible for ATAR	66%	63%	66%	68%	67%
Non-Aboriginal Students					
Awarded HSC	12,434	12,283	12,251	12,141	12,389
Eligible for ATAR	10,314	10,034	10,014	9,986	10,095
% Eligible for ATAR	83%	82%	82%	82%	81%

Source: NESA HSC Extract

The percentage of Aboriginal students in systemic Catholic schools eligible for an ATAR of 67% in 2023 and maintains the gap at 14%, the lowest level over the past five years. Refer to *Table 1*. For context, 52% of Aboriginal students in NSW schools who were awarded their HSC were eligible for an ATAR.³

¹ Per the NESA Student Identities records for 2023 HSC. Note this information comes from school records which relies on students being correctly identified and recorded.

² In 2023, 374 Year 12 students were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the August Census; 248 students were identified in NESA records for the HSC. Caution should be taken when comparing data from two different sources

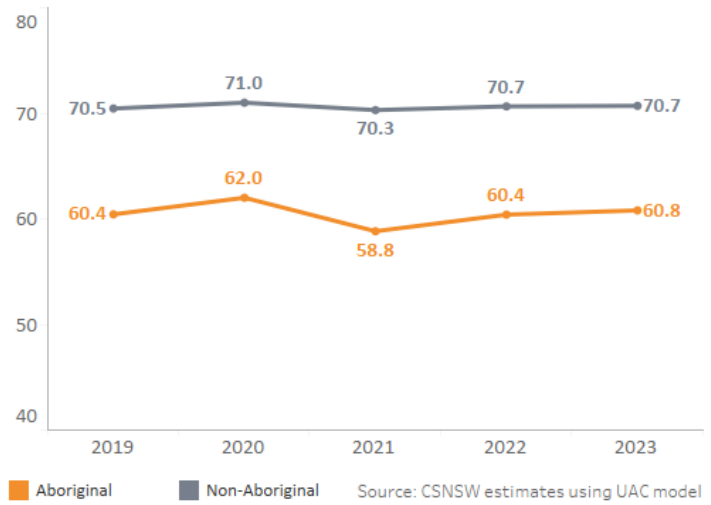
³ NESA HSC 2023: Results Summary, December 2023

As shown in *Figure 20*, the median ATAR¹ 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 (71.05 in 2023 as released by UAC²).

The median ATAR for Aboriginal students has averaged approximately 10 points lower over the past five years, ranging from 58.8 to 62.0. In 2023, the gap in median ATAR in systemic Catholic schools closed slightly to 9.9.

FIGURE 20

MEDIAN ATAR TRENDS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



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 expected³.

Figure 21 below groups HSC Bands 1 & 2, 3 & 4 and 5 & 6 for HSC subjects studied by Aboriginal students between 2019 and 2023. The Bands 5 & 6 rate increased again in 2023 to 26.6%. The Bands 1 & 2 rate also fell again to 12.3% in 2023.

Figure 22 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. Both cohorts had an increase in 2023, with the gap falling again to 12.1% compared with 19.2% in 2021. This is the smallest gap in the last five years.

FIGURE 21

ABORIGINAL STUDENT HSC BAND GROUPS - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

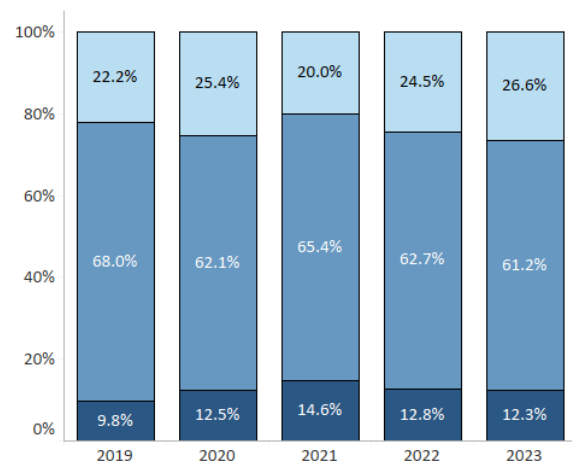
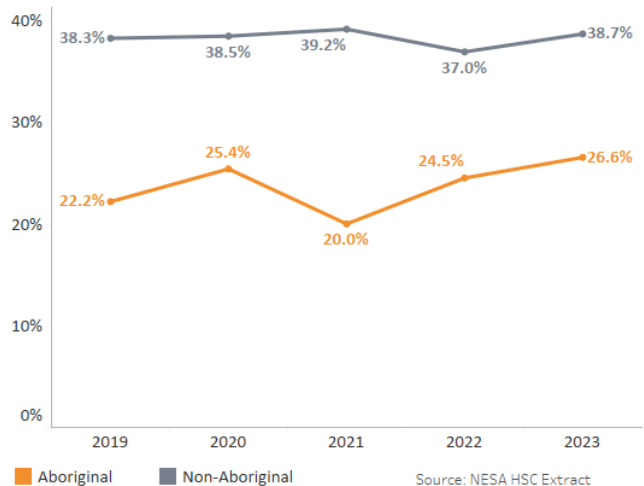


FIGURE 22

BANDS 5 & 6 RATES - NSW SYSTEMIC CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



¹ Median ATARs are estimated by CSNSW modelling using, HSC marks and Tables A3 and A9 of the [“ATAR 2023 – Preliminary Report on the Scaling of the 2023 NSW HSC”, UAC](#)

² Report link above

³ <<https://arc2.nesa.nsw.edu.au/page/faq>>

HSC SUBJECT SELECTION

Table 2 shows the proportion of total HSC subject units taken in each key learning area 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, technologies, creative arts and VET subjects compared to non-Aboriginal students. The proportion of Aboriginal students taking science subjects increased to 12.1% in 2023 (9.3% in 2022), a similar rate to non-Aboriginal students.

High-scaling subjects¹ represent 10.9% (up from 9.1% in 2022) of HSC units taken by Aboriginal students compared to 17.5% for non-Aboriginal students.

High-scaling subject areas include Chemistry, Economics, English, History, Mathematics, Music, Physics and Science (advanced and extension subjects where applicable).

TABLE 2

HSC Key Learning Area in Systemic Catholic Schools	% of Units Taken 2023	
	Aboriginal Students	Non-Aboriginal Students
Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)	24.6%	27.4%
English	18.9%	19.3%
Mathematics	15.6%	17.3%
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE)	12.7%	9.6%
Science	12.1%	12.0%
Technologies	6.7%	6.1%
Creative Arts	5.3%	4.5%
Vocational and Educational Training (VET)	4.0%	2.7%
Languages	0.3%	1.0%

Source: NESA HSC Extract; Systemic schools only

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

¹ High-scaling subjects are courses where the average scaled score was over 30, excluding languages (which typically have small cohorts)

VET AND POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools participated in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses at a slightly higher rate (33.6%) than non-Aboriginal students (32%).
- ▶ Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in NSW Catholic schools select similar courses for their top 5 choices. In 2023, the completion rate is slightly higher for Aboriginal HSC students at 83%, compared to 82% for non-Aboriginal students where the full certificate is available. This figure is 73% for Aboriginal HSC students in Catholic schools achieving a Certificate III, where available.
- ▶ Although there is no sector breakdown, the overall rate of Aboriginal school leavers in NSW either in employment or education/training has increased to 83.9% for school completers and 74.5% for early school leavers in 2022.

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%”.

“Youth are engaged in employment or education” is another stated outcome of the Closing the Gap agreement, with a stated target “By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67%.”

VET PARTICIPATION

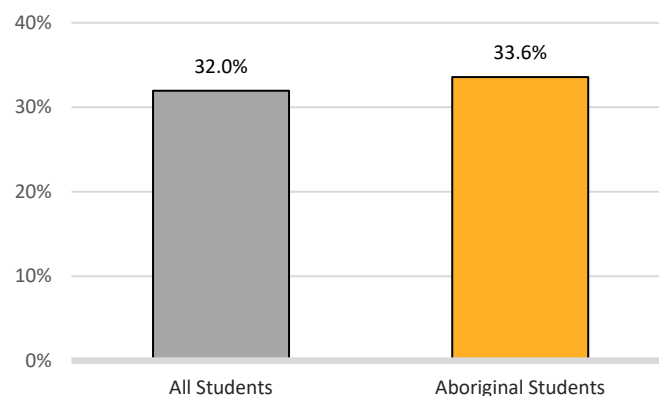
In 2022 (the most recent cross-sector data available), almost 10,900 Year 11 and 12 students in NSW Catholic schools participated in VET courses through diocesan Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). This is estimated to make up around 32% of the cohort, which is slightly higher than the 29% figure for Government schools, and significantly higher than the 12% for Independent schools. Refer to *Figure 23*.

In NSW Catholic schools, the estimated VET participation rate of 33.6% for Aboriginal students is slightly higher than the total of 32% for all students.

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

FIGURE 23

ESTIMATED % OF YEAR 11/12 CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TAKING VET COURSES, 2022



Source: NCVET DataBuilder 2022, August Census 2022

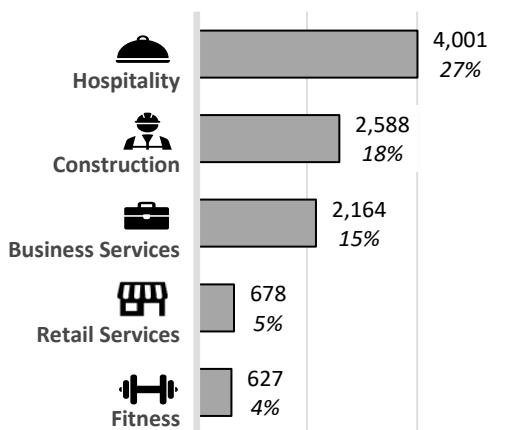
VET COURSE SELECTION

The three most common VET courses in NSW Catholic schools for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are hospitality, construction, and business services in 2023. These courses comprise 59% of VET course selections for non-Aboriginal students and 58% for Aboriginal students (Refer to *Figure 24* and *Figure 25*). Aboriginal students' fourth most common choice was in human services courses, compared with the non-

Aboriginal cohort selection of retail services. Fitness was also the fifth top choice across both cohorts for the first time in 2023, indicating an increased interest in wellbeing careers and the availability of courses. Top course choices were the same when looking at Year 12 selections only across both cohorts, except for fifth place for Aboriginal students, where primary industries replaced fitness. Rural employment opportunities influence this course selection.

FIGURE 24

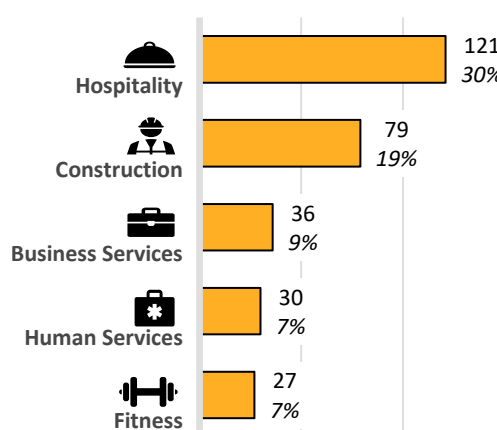
TOP 5 VET COURSES FOR NON-ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, 2023



Source: NESA VCS Online 2023

FIGURE 25

TOP 5 VET COURSES FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN NSW CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, 2023



Source: NESA VCS Online 2023

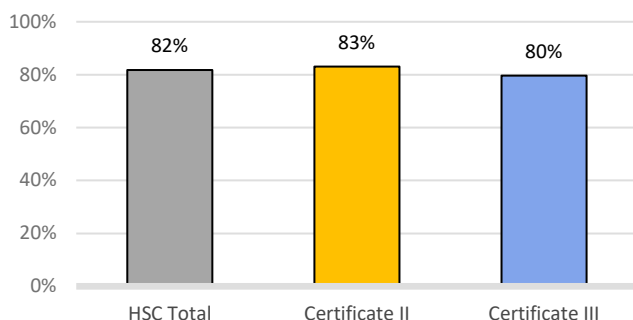
VET COMPLETION

Students vary in the proportion of the VET qualification they complete while at school. They most commonly complete the full certificate, the nationally recognised qualification for entry-level work in a particular industry. Some students 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.

Where a full certificate is available, around 82% of all HSC students in Catholic schools achieved it in 2023, compared to 83% of Aboriginal students. (Refer to *Figure 26* and *Figure 27*) Studying towards or obtaining a Certificate III is the minimum requirement for employment in certain industries, particularly health and education. In Catholic schools in 2023, 80% of all HSC students and 73% of Aboriginal students enrolled in a Certificate III achieved their qualification (where the full certificate was available).

FIGURE 26

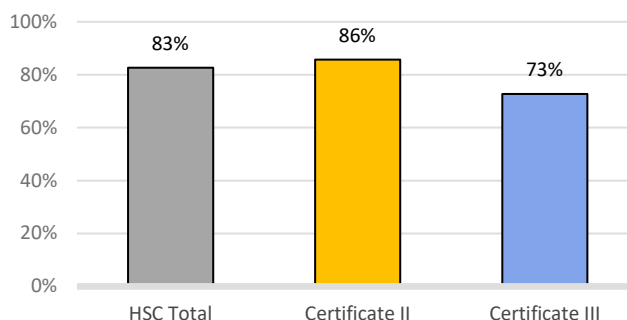
% OF ALL HSC STUDENTS AWARDED FULL CERTIFICATE WHERE AVAILABLE BY LEVEL, 2023



Source: NESA VCS Online, 2023

FIGURE 27

% OF ABORIGINAL HSC STUDENTS AWARDED FULL CERTIFICATE WHERE AVAILABLE BY LEVEL, 2023



Note: Certificate I is not shown as typically c.1% of student selections

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

Each year, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) 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').¹ Early School Leavers are Year 10, Year 11 or Year 12 students. There is no sector breakdown for results for Aboriginal students, due to small sample sizes. The following information summarises CESE's survey results of Aboriginal students at the NSW state level only. In 2022, 1,094 Aboriginal Year 12 completers and 765 Aboriginal early school leavers completed the survey.

From the 2022 cohort, 83.9% of Aboriginal Year 12 completers (*Figure 28*) and 74.5% of Aboriginal early school leavers (*Figure 29*) were in education, training, or employment. This compares to 94.6% and 87.4% of non-Aboriginal Year 12 completers and early school leavers, respectively. This is an improvement from 2021 when the rates were 80.8% of Aboriginal Year 12 completers and 69.9% of Aboriginal early school leavers.

FIGURE 28

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS OF **YEAR 12 COMPLETERS**, 2022

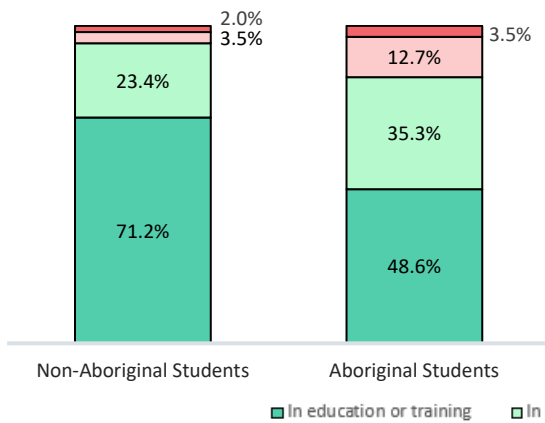
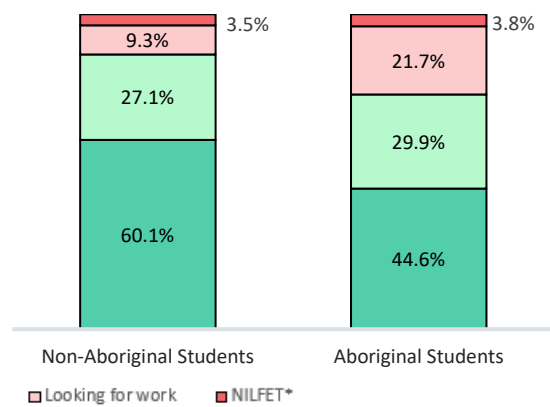


FIGURE 29

POST-SCHOOL DESTINATIONS OF **EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS**, 2022



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

*NILFET means not in the labour force, education or training.

For Year 12 completers, there has been a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students enrolled in education or training after leaving school since 2014. This has been more than offset by the increase in the proportion of Aboriginal students in full-time or part-time work, reaching 83.9% in 2022 (refer to *Figure 30*).

Figure 31 shows that in 2022, 29.9% of Aboriginal early school leavers were engaged in work, either full-time or part-time, over double the 14.5% rate in 2014. As a result, in 2022, there were 20.2% fewer Aboriginal early school leavers looking for work or not in the labour force, education or training ('NILFET') compared with 2014.

FIGURE 30

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

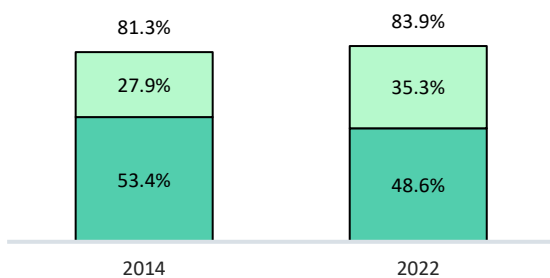
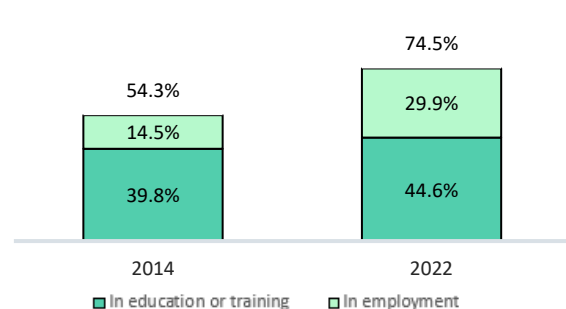


FIGURE 31

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



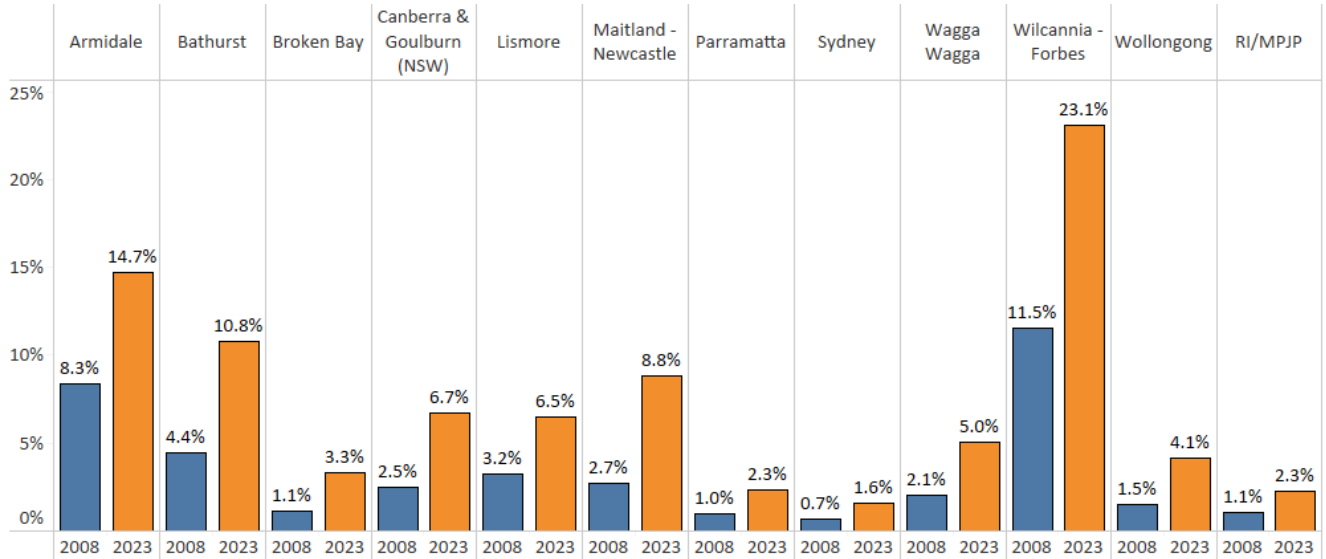
Source: NSW DoE 2022 Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey.

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

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

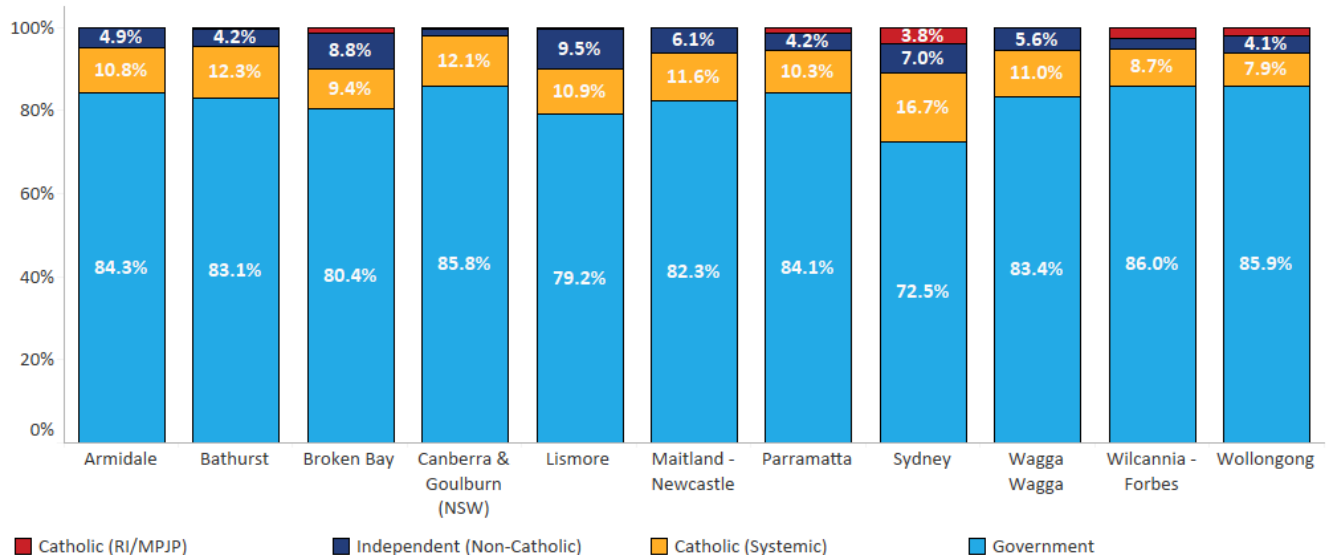
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AS % OF COHORT BY DIOCESE, 2008 VS 2023



Source: ACARA MySchool Datasets

APPENDIX 2

PROPORTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS BY SECTOR BY DIOCESE - NSW SCHOOLS, 2023



Source: ACARA MySchool datasets.

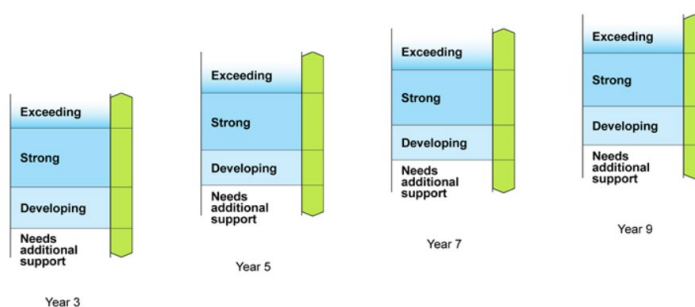
APPENDIX 3

NAPLAN 2023

- The NAPLAN test window moved to March from May.
- Student achievement is now reported against proficiency standards on a new NAPLAN measurement scale, that makes better use of online adaptive tests. This replaces the “band” methodology used in previous years. The proficiency levels are as follows:
 - **Exceeding** – the student’s result exceeds expectations at the time of testing.
 - **Strong** – the student’s result meets challenging but reasonable expectations at the time of testing.
 - **Developing** – the student’s result indicates that they are working towards expectations at the time of testing.
 - **Needs additional support (NAS)** – the student’s result indicates that they are not achieving the learning outcomes that are expected at the time of testing. They are likely to need additional support to progress satisfactorily.

- The diagram to the right illustrates the progression of proficiency levels from Year 3 to Year 9. It shows an average of the five domain areas.

Diagram: NAPLAN measurement scales averaged across domains



There are slight variations between domain areas – the precise location of each proficiency level on the NAPLAN scale is shown in the table below.

- Proficiency results are only available for the Catholic sector.

Table: NAPLAN scale score cut points (lower bounds) between proficiency levels

Domain	Year	Needs additional support / Developing	Developing / Strong	Strong / Exceeding
Numeracy	3	311	378	493
	5	386	451	577
	7	431	500	632
	9	463	536	673
Reading	3	282	368	481
	5	377	448	555
	7	430	500	603
	9	464	539	639
Writing	3	296	370	503
	5	385	455	570
	7	439	511	614
	9	469	553	647
Spelling	3	294	380	489
	5	378	451	553
	7	430	497	595
	9	470	532	627
Grammar and Punctuation	3	312	404	523
	5	397	470	582
	7	444	513	620
	9	460	545	649

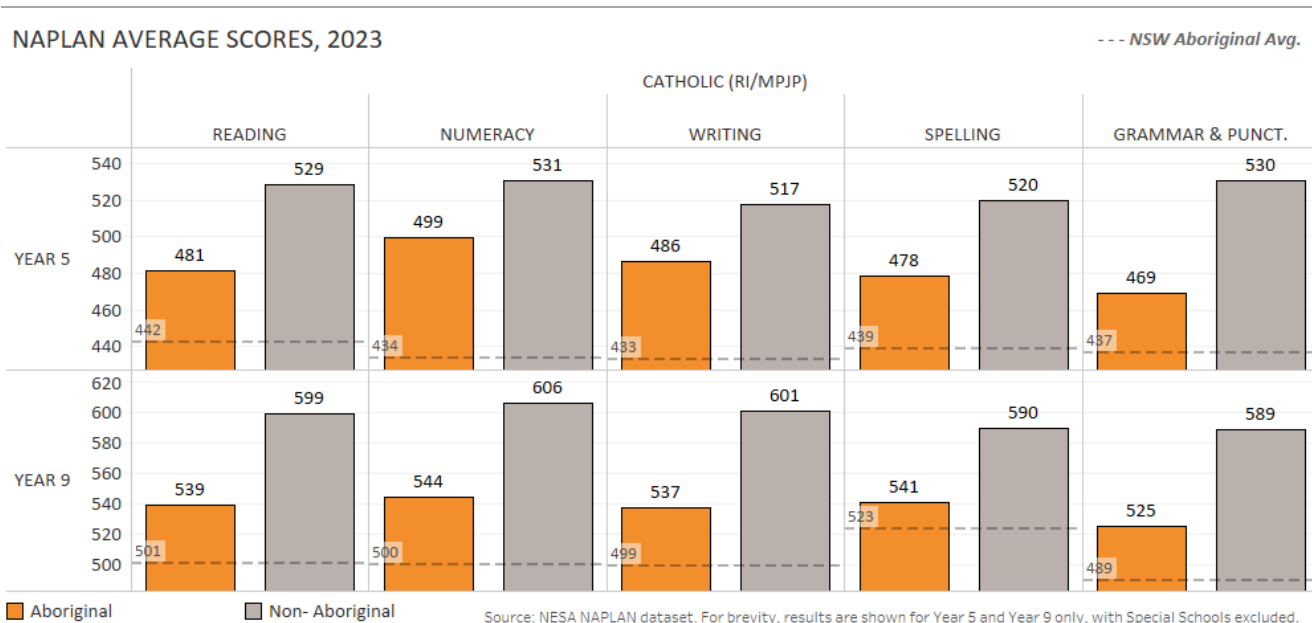
- The changes to the NAPLAN measurement scale and test window resulted in the NAPLAN time series being reset, which means results from 2023 onwards cannot be directly compared with results from 2008 to 2022. (As such, this report covers 2023 only).
- Given that the NAPLAN time series was reset in 2023, progress results will not be available until 2025.

APPENDIX 4

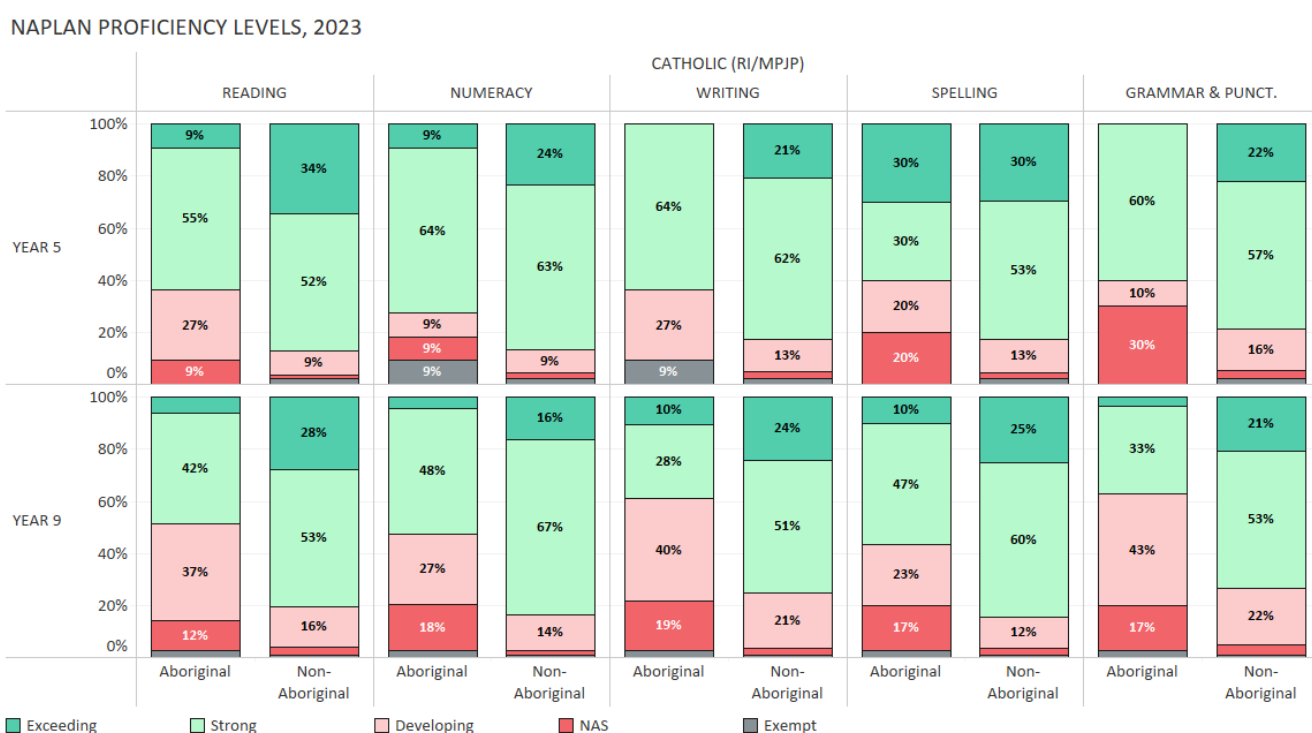
Analysis comparing NAPLAN performance between Catholic RI/MPJP school Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students should be treated with caution for two reasons:

1. The number of Aboriginal students sitting tests in each NAPLAN cohort is very small. In 2023 the number of Aboriginal students in Catholic RI/MPJP schools sitting at least 1 NAPLAN test in each grade was 3 in Year 3, 11 in Year 5, 153 in Year 7, and 113 in Year 9.
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.

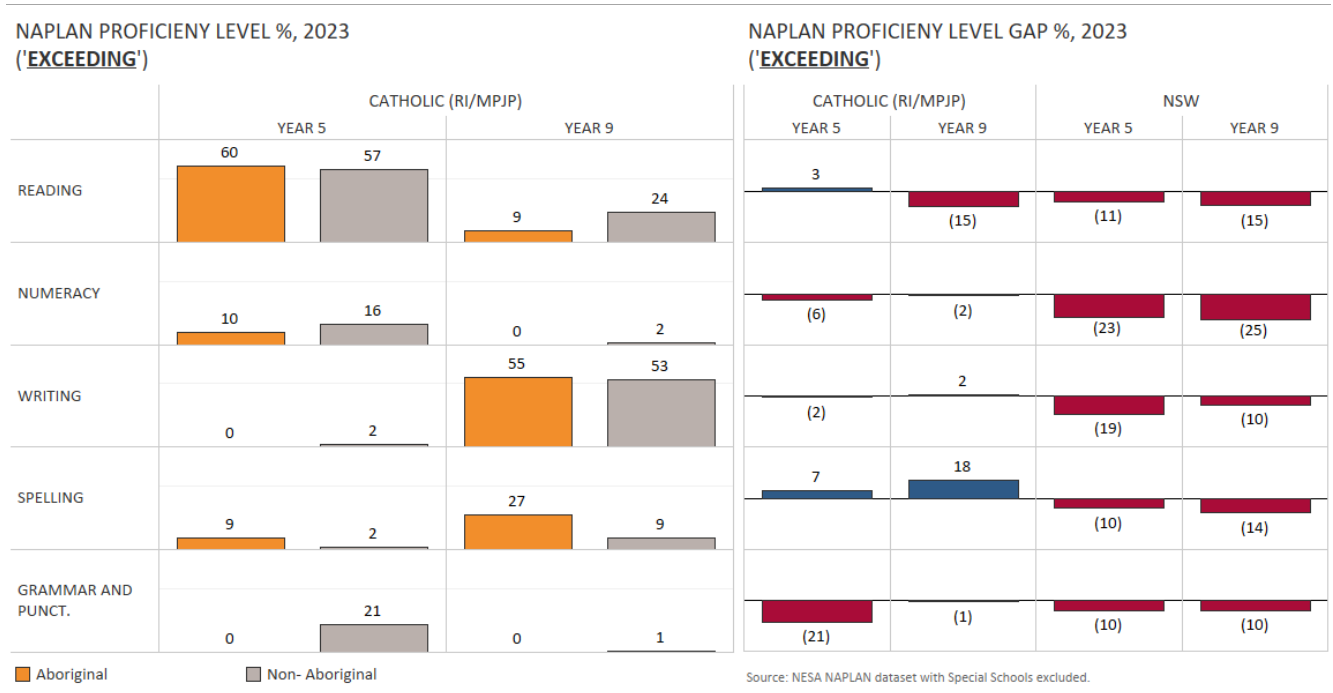
NAPLAN AVERAGE SCORES, 2023 – RI/MPJP SCHOOLS



PROFICIENCY LEVELS, 2023 – RI/MPJP SCHOOLS



EXCEEDING PROFICIENCY LEVEL, 2023 – RI/MPJP SCHOOLS



NEEDS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROFICIENCY LEVEL, 2023 – RI/MPJP SCHOOLS

