

Kindergarten to Year 2

Curriculum implementation at Biraban Public School

A case study of K–10 English and mathematics

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



About this resource

In 2022, 396 schools across NSW participated in a pilot project to enhance the NSW Department of Education's development and delivery of comprehensive support for implementation of the new English and mathematics K-10 syllabuses.

These early adopter schools implemented the new English and mathematics syllabuses with their Year 1 cohorts, testing supports such as microlearning modules, scope and sequences, and sample units. Implementation support developed and refined in 2022, as a result of feedback from participating schools, is available to all schools ahead of mandatory implementation of the new syllabuses for Kindergarten to Year 2 from 2023.

This case study by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) is part of a series on how early adopter schools have begun implementing new curriculum. Each case study shares how the focus school has engaged with the new syllabuses and explores key themes in how they approached curriculum implementation responsive to their context. The evidence base for the case studies can be found in the department's curriculum implementation research toolkit.

When and how to use

School leaders and teachers can read, consider, discuss and implement strategies highlighted in the case study and its accompanying discussion guide as part of school-developed High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL).

The appropriate time to use this resource may differ for each school, leader and teacher.

School leaders can:

- unpack the case study and curriculum resources as part of whole-school professional development and/or stage or grade team meetings
- access the phases of curriculum implementation and role-specific resources to support reflection and planning for effective implementation of curriculum
- access their school's data to lead discussions with staff about areas for improvement at a classroom and whole-school level.

Teachers can:

- read the case study and curriculum resources and reflect on current practice
- access the phases of curriculum implementation and role-specific resources to support reflection and planning for effective implementation of curriculum
- consider which practices could be implemented in the classroom to lift student achievement, and discuss their thoughts with colleagues
- reflect on the impact of implementation.

Contact: Email feedback about this resource to info@cese.nsw.gov.au.

You can also subscribe to the CESE newsletter and connect with us on Yammer.

Alignment to system priorities and/or needs: NSW Curriculum Reform, NSW Department of Education Literacy and numeracy priorities, School Success Model, School Excellence in Action, Mathematics Strategy 2025

Alignment to School Excellence Framework: Learning domain – curriculum, assessment; Teaching domain – professional standards, effective classroom practice, data skills and use; Leading domain – educational leadership, school planning, implementation and reporting

Alignment with other existing frameworks: High Impact Professional Learning, What works best, Curriculum planning and programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12, Literacy K-12, Numeracy K-12, Aboriginal Education, Inclusive Education for students with disability, High Potential and Gifted Education, Multicultural Education, Controversial Issues in Schools

Reviewed by: Curriculum and Reform; Educational Standards; Teaching Quality and Impact; Inclusion and Wellbeing

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Implementing a new curriculum

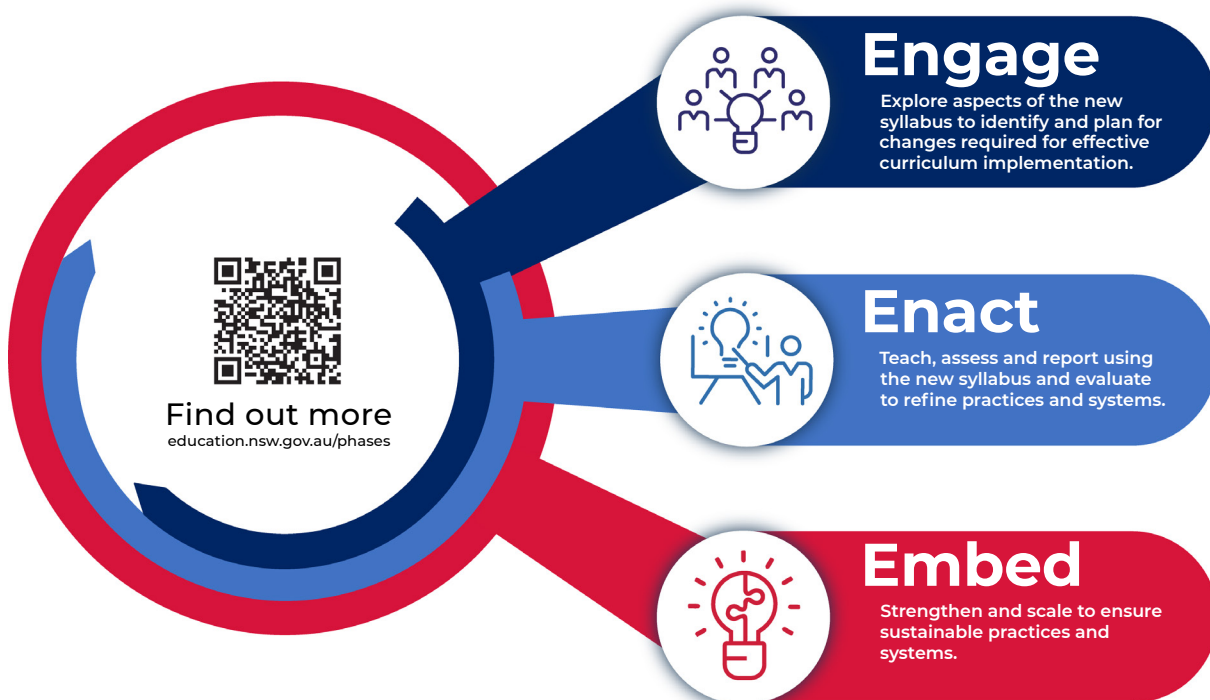
The NSW Curriculum Review, released in June 2020, was the first major review of the entire NSW school curriculum since 1989. Informed by research and extensive consultation with thousands of teachers, parents and education experts, it concluded that change was needed. In response, the NSW Government is reforming the curriculum to ensure that every student ‘learns with understanding, builds skills in applying knowledge, and makes excellent ongoing progress in their learning’.

In NSW, the curriculum can be thought of as the learning expectations and educational opportunities represented by syllabuses. It provides essential learning for all students and opportunities for them to show what they know, understand and can do. The curriculum also provides flexibility for teachers to meet students’ needs and interests.

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is responsible for developing new syllabuses that adopt and adapt the Australian Curriculum for NSW schools. Syllabuses clarify the learning expectations of a subject or discipline, including outcomes and content, and form the basis for the development of teaching and learning programs. NSW Government schools plan for learning based on mandated syllabus documents and current departmental policies and procedures.

Phases of curriculum implementation

Effective curriculum implementation is an iterative process for school leaders and teachers, rather than a singular event. The phases of curriculum implementation (engage, enact, embed) can be used as a guide to support activities and reflective thinking when implementing a new syllabus. School leaders and teachers can find a range of [resources aligned to the phases of curriculum implementation](https://education.nsw.gov.au/phases) on the department’s website.



School context

Biraban Public School is situated on Awabakal land on the western side of Lake Macquarie. The school has a FOEI of 149.¹ It has a current enrolment of 153 students across 8 classes, including a Year 5/6 opportunity class and 2 classes for students with additional learning and support needs. Of the 153 students enrolled, 39% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and the school has strong links with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and partnership with the nearby Nikinpa Aboriginal Child and Family Centre. About 20 staff members are employed at the school, including 2 assistant principals, curriculum and instruction (AP, C&I). One AP, C&I has a focus on Kindergarten to Year 2, and the other on Years 3 to 6. Many of the teachers at Biraban Public School have been teaching for 5 years or less, and school leaders have invested in professional learning across the school to support development. The school is committed to providing quality teaching and learning experiences through a focus on evidence-based literacy and numeracy teaching practices and student wellbeing.

Implementing new curriculum at Biraban Public School – an overview

As Biraban Public School was an early adopter school in 2022, Kindergarten to Year 6 teachers engaged in professional learning about the new curriculum and one Year 1 teacher began implementing the new curriculum in her classroom.

School leaders believe that Biraban Public School was well placed for the changes needed to implement the new curriculum. They believe that their involvement in the Early Action for Success (EAfS) strategy laid a strong foundation for preparing the school for the pedagogical shifts in the new curriculum. For example, all teaching staff at Biraban Public School had previously engaged in professional learning about evidence-based literacy and numeracy practices that align with the pedagogical approaches needed for teaching the new K–10 English and mathematics syllabuses. In addition, the AP, C&Is have built on instructional leadership structures and processes the school began during its EAfS involvement. As instructional leaders, the AP, C&Is play a critical role in curriculum implementation, working collaboratively with teachers to refine, enact and contextualise evidence-based pedagogical approaches.



What has worked to implement new curriculum at Biraban Public School

- Creating a school culture receptive to the new curriculum by **communicating curriculum changes using familiar frameworks** and **using a collaborative approach to build clear expectations and shared goals**
- Adapting school structures and processes, including **timetabling dedicated time for all staff to engage with the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of the new curriculum** and **sharing curriculum changes through parent communication channels**
- Developing quality classroom-based practices for curriculum delivery by **building teacher capabilities to use student data to inform teaching and learning**

¹ Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) is a school-level index of educational disadvantage related to socioeconomic background. The average FOEI value is 100. A higher FOEI value indicates a higher level of disadvantage.



Creating a school culture receptive to the new curriculum

Communicating curriculum changes using familiar frameworks

School leaders at Biraban Public School have taken time to draw connections between the new curriculum and current school priorities and practices, and to make these connections explicit to staff. For example, the principal and AP, C&I (K-2) use the common language between the new syllabuses, the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions and the reading and numeracy guides to help show teachers familiar aspects of the new syllabuses. Since teachers understand how these other resources fit into the school's existing priorities, school leaders have been able to support teachers to view the new curriculum as a continuation and formalisation of a journey the school had already begun.

School leaders supporting teachers to see these links has also helped to make teaching the new syllabuses feel less overwhelming. For example, the Year 1 teacher reported that reflecting on the alignment between the syllabuses and the reading and numeracy guides was especially useful for reducing her initial concern that she was going to have to completely change her teaching practice. Seeing this strong alignment reassured her that she and other school staff had the core knowledge and skills needed to teach the new syllabuses.

“We’ve unpacked [the reading and numeracy] guides multiple times in staff professional development. ... When I made those connections between the reading and numeracy guides and the syllabus, I started to feel that pressure was a little bit alleviated, because those conversations were already happening in the school.”

Melissa McDonald, Teacher



Using a collaborative approach to build clear expectations and shared goals

The principal, AP, C&I (K–2) and the Year 1 classroom teacher all acknowledged that a supportive, collaborative culture is fundamental to their school's openness to curriculum changes. One critical aspect of this culture is the way school leaders have restructured the school's professional learning approach to collaboratively build clear, shared expectations and goals for teaching the new curriculum. In line with the High Impact Professional Learning (HIPL) model, school leaders prioritise giving time for collaboration, team teaching, observations and feedback.

“[The school executive] don't just sit and plan everything for the school and then say, 'This is what we're doing.' ... They'll plan, and then [ask], 'What does everyone else think about this? Where do you think we need to pivot? What do you think we should be doing? What do you need more of?' It's not just what they see, it's what we need. We've got the opportunity to express what we need. So you just feel so valued. Your opinion matters.”

Melissa McDonald, Teacher

Initially this required school leaders to identify where they saw alignment between the new curriculum and current school practices, where refinement was needed, and where there were gaps in teacher understanding or skills. The leadership team then used these insights to develop a scope and sequence for professional learning across the year. Each term there is an area of focus. For example, in Term 1 of 2022, school leaders identified number talks as a pedagogical practice that could support teaching the new mathematics syllabus.² Over 5 weeks, professional learning time was timetabled into whole-school staff meetings where teachers and school leaders collaborated to develop lesson plans and documentation of what number talks look like at Biraban Public School. Teachers also spent time observing each other teach and provided feedback to further improve the delivery of number talks in the classroom.



During the 5 weeks, time was also scheduled in stage meetings for reflection and follow-up support. This approach not only supported the Year 1 teacher who had started teaching the new mathematics syllabus, but also provided an opportunity for collective understanding of expectations and goals of this teaching practice.

“... at the beginning of the year, we had a 5-week professional learning cycle on number talks, and I think that's a really great pedagogy and practice that sits perfectly with the new syllabus. ... Getting familiar with pedagogy and practice just means that things work a little bit easier.”

Melissa McDonald, Teacher

² More information about using number talks can be found in the Using number talks and number sense routines across K–6 online course developed by the NSW Maths Strategy Professional Learning team.

Adapting school structures and processes

Timetabling dedicated time for all staff to engage with the 'what' and 'why' of the new curriculum

Biraban Public School has dedicated time in every staff and stage meeting for curriculum matters. In particular, staff use this time to complete department-developed microlearning modules (refer to 'Resources to support curriculum implementation' text box) about curriculum implementation and engage in discussions about the content and how it applies to their school context. For example, as [English K-2 microlearning](#) and [mathematics K-2 microlearning](#) modules were released, school leaders identified modules that aligned with school priorities and needs. School leaders then scheduled time during stage meetings for teachers to complete and discuss these modules. All teachers in the school complete these microlearning modules, partly because class allocation from year to year is uncertain, but also because school leaders believe it is important for teachers of later stages to understand the evidence base that underpins the new syllabuses. Staff currently teaching Kindergarten to Year 2 also have additional dedicated time during their stage meetings to directly engage with the English and mathematics K-2 sample units (refer to 'Resources to support curriculum implementation' text box). During these meetings, the AP, C&I (K-2) uses the sample units to help unpack what the new syllabus means for classroom practice. These meetings provide opportunities for the Year 1 teacher to share her experience teaching the sample units with other Kindergarten to Year 2 teachers.

“... We wanted our primary teachers to have understanding of what the evidence is telling us, in terms of teaching reading and early phonics, phonemic awareness. Just because those kids are in Year 4/5/6, some of those kids have not got ... phonics and phonemic awareness. So we wanted all our staff to have an understanding that we may need to go back [to phonemic awareness and phonics], based on assessment data.”

Allison Pattison, Principal

Sharing curriculum changes through parent communication channels

School leaders and the Year 1 teacher recognise the importance of engaging with parents to build understanding about the curriculum changes and why learning may look different. They use established communication channels such as the school newsletter, Facebook page (where they have strong community engagement), and parent-teacher interviews to keep parents informed about the new syllabuses. The Year 1 teacher has found it helpful in parent-teacher interviews to share student work samples that demonstrate some of the curriculum changes. Throughout 2022, she continued to share work samples regularly with parents using the online platform ClassDojo. Biraban Public School has also used the new syllabuses as an opportunity to change reporting of Kindergarten to Year 2 student progress to parents. Reports now use the language of syllabus content areas and outcomes. To prepare for the mandatory implementation of the new syllabuses in 2023, the school also organised parent workshops at the end of 2022, focused on the new syllabuses.



Developing quality classroom-based practices for curriculum delivery

Building teacher capabilities to use student data to inform teaching and learning

“... So that hour a week to sit with [K–2] staff and look at data, and then look at classroom practice ... those types of practices that we see in those [sample] units. I think that’s been the most valuable thing. ... So, even the Kindergarten teacher who’s not trialling the units exclusively, she’s still implementing practice, reflective of what’s in the units.”

Aaron Quinnell, AP, C&I (K–2)

All teachers at Biraban Public School have a weekly, one-hour, one-to-one ‘data talk’ with an AP, C&I to unpack student data to inform classroom practice. This can include data from PLAN2, the Phonological Awareness Diagnostic Assessment and Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, internal school assessments, student work samples and observational data. The AP, C&I (K–2) and the Year 1 teacher reported that this time has been vital for teachers to confidently teach the new syllabus content.

These data talks are used flexibly to provide tailored support to teachers. For example, the Year 1 teacher identified that she needed support with teaching writing. The teacher and AP, C&I (K–2) worked together to explore PLAN2 data for creating written texts to understand where students were at in their learning, and then adapted the writing activities in the English K–2 sample units to support and extend students. This included using PLAN2 to develop focus goals for each student, which were pasted in students’ books and updated every week. The teacher reported that these goals have helped students take ownership of their learning and helped her monitor their progress and achievement. Subsequent data talks evaluated the impact of adapting writing activities in the English K–2 sample units.

The data talks also provide opportunities for the AP, C&I (K–2) to understand and support staff needs. The conversations with the Year 1 teacher about writing in the English K–2 sample units



identified a need for expert support around writing pedagogy. With the principal’s help, the AP, C&I arranged for all Kindergarten to Year 2 teachers to undertake external professional learning about writing pedagogy. The Year 1 teacher highlighted that the data talks on writing, alongside the targeted professional learning around writing pedagogy, have greatly increased her confidence in differentiating writing activities for her students.

“I’ll input their data [on PLAN2], and basically, the next progression point or indicator that my students need to achieve, I just snip that out, glue it in their book, and have that conference with the students. ... It’s just so motivating for them as well, to see, ‘Okay, so this week my goal is, I’ve got to have a capital letter and a full stop.’ ... They actually come up to you and they’re saying, ‘Look, I’ve achieved my goal.’”

Melissa McDonald, Teacher

Where to from here

School leaders at Biraban Public School believe they have created a strong foundation for the mandatory implementation of the new K-10 syllabuses in all Kindergarten to Year 2 classes in 2023. Their immediate goals include strengthening their engagement with parents by running workshops in 2023 to help parents understand the 'why' of the syllabus changes and how classroom practices may look different from what past students experienced. School leaders also plan to continue whole-school professional learning related to the new syllabuses, with a particular focus on mathematics and curriculum implementation more generally. Given their expertise in explicit teaching and understanding of the evidence underpinning the new syllabuses, staff at Biraban Public School feel confident to engage with the new 3-6 section of the K-10 English and mathematics syllabuses in 2023. The principal aims to develop whole-school collective efficacy to implement these new sections by taking the time to explore, collaborate and reflect together as a team. The teachers at the school are also keen to share their experiences as an early adopter school with other schools in their network.

Acknowledgements

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Resources to support curriculum implementation

The NSW Department of Education has developed a suite of resources to support the implementation of the new curriculum.

Professional learning

Schools can access a range of [professional learning resources on the new curriculum](#). As part of these resources, the department has developed online microlearning modules to support teachers' knowledge and skills for effective curriculum implementation, including:

- [English K-2 microlearning](#)
- [Mathematics K-2 microlearning](#)
- [Curriculum planning K-12 professional learning](#).

Sample units

The department has also developed sample units to support the implementation of the new curriculum. The sample units represent one approach to designing teaching and learning experiences for Kindergarten to Year 2 and can be adapted to suit the school context and students' needs. The department provides:

- [English K-2 units](#)
- [Mathematics K-2 units](#).

Leading curriculum K-12

There is also a range of [advice and resources available to support school leaders to lead effective curriculum implementation in their schools](#).

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