

Kindergarten to Year 2

Curriculum implementation at Walcha Central 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

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Implementing a new curriculum

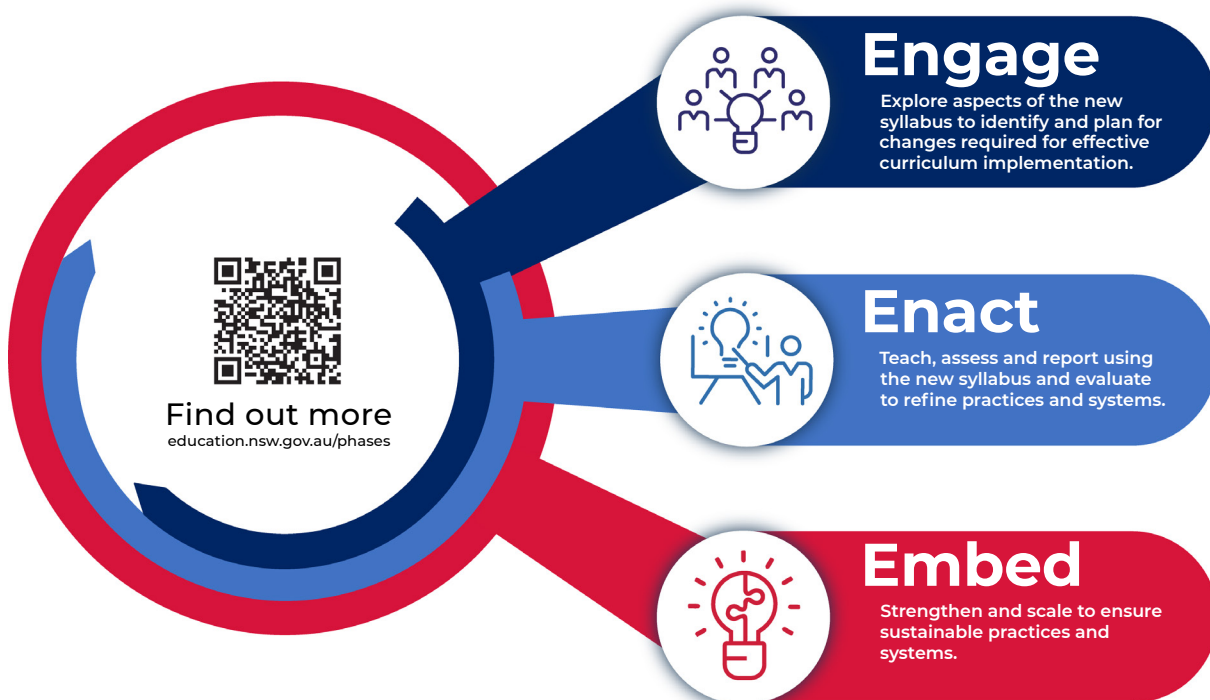
The NSW Curriculum Review, released in June 2020, was the first major review of the entire NSW school curriculum since 1989. Informed by research and extensive consultation with thousands of teachers, parents and education experts, it concluded that change was needed. In response, the NSW Government 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

Walcha Central School is a rural Kindergarten to Year 12 school situated on Dunghutti land. The school is located 45 minutes from Armidale and an hour from Tamworth, providing the school with close access to a large number of services. The school commonly caters for students who live in Armidale, Walcha and surrounding farming communities. The school has a FOEI of 109.¹ There are approximately 150 students enrolled in the primary cohort and 115 students in the secondary cohort. Approximately 23% of students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. There are 2 Year 1/2 multi-age classes, and the rest of the primary cohort has one class per grade. Walcha Central School has a diverse mix of staff, ranging from early-career teachers to experienced teachers. The school has 35 teachers, including 2 Kindergarten to Year 6 teaching assistant principals, and an assistant principal, curriculum and instruction (AP, C&I). Walcha Central School prides itself on providing 'a journey of learning from K to 12'.

“... It's a journey of learning K to 12. We really look at the school being one school, that's a really, really important aspect for us ...”

Amanda Cooper, Principal

Implementing new curriculum at Walcha Central School – an overview

As an early adopter school in 2022, K–6 teachers at Walcha Central School engaged in professional learning about the new curriculum, and two Year 1/2 classes implemented it. The opportunity to be an early adopter school aligned with the school's continuous improvement philosophy to provide evidence-based teaching and learning experiences for students. At the beginning of the year, the school faced challenges of having limited access to staff due to its rural location and staff absences from COVID-19. At one stage, the AP, C&I and principal were both preparing to return to the classroom due to the uncertainty of staff placements. However, the principal was able to appoint a second Year 1/2 teacher shortly before Term 1 began. The uncertainty of staff placements impacted the school's initial preparation for the curriculum reform. For example, the late appointment of the Year 1/2 teacher meant that this teacher had not had the opportunity to complete the online curriculum reform professional learning before she began teaching the new syllabuses. Walcha Central School has worked hard to overcome these initial challenges by implementing the new curriculum using innovative and contextualised strategies.



What has worked to implement new curriculum at Walcha Central School

- Effective leadership and change management approaches including **selecting an expert leader to drive curriculum implementation** and **using data to support pedagogical changes**
- Developing quality classroom-based practices for curriculum delivery by **tailoring support to staff needs** and **navigating the new curriculum as a team**
- Adapting school structures and processes, including **developing collective responsibility and shared understanding** and **reorganising staff meetings to prioritise collaboration**

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.



Effective leadership and change management approaches

Selecting an expert leader to drive curriculum implementation

The AP, C&I has played a core role in leading Walcha Central School through the curriculum changes. The principal highlighted how important it is to appoint a leader that has the expert leadership skills and knowledge to lead staff through the changes. The AP, C&I is well placed to lead the implementation because of her recent classroom experience and her previous leadership role as an assistant principal at the school. Given the range of initiatives in the Kindergarten to Year 12 school, having a dedicated leader for curriculum implementation allows the principal to have an overview of the changes and provide targeted advice when necessary. For example, the AP, C&I provides weekly updates in executive staff meetings of key strategies and practices being used, and the principal will often act as a ‘sounding board’ to provide advice on next steps. Recognising the value of having a key leader during the K–10 curriculum changes, the principal has asked the AP, C&I to begin upskilling a dedicated leader in the high school team.

“... [The AP, C&I will] come to me as a sounding board for [questions] like, ‘Where are we going? Does this sound like it’s working?’ But that’s really important, that you’ve actually got a key person – that’s your hook.”

Amanda Cooper, Principal

Using data to support pedagogical changes

“[The teachers are] coming along on the journey a bit better ... they talk about the successes of the kids ... ‘We can really see the difference’ and you can hear the chatter, even if I’m not part of it, in the staffroom where they’re talking to other teachers about how they saw that, and I’m thinking, yes!”

Jodi McAlister, AP, C&I

Another change management approach Walcha Central School has adopted is using student data to communicate the need for change. For example, the AP, C&I acknowledged that some teachers were initially reluctant to incorporate decodable texts into their classroom practice.² The new English K–10 curriculum focuses on using decodable texts in the early years of school to target students’ understanding of letter–sound relationships. Recognising the importance of shifting teachers’ attitudes towards using decodable texts, the AP, C&I used data from the [Year 1 Phonics Screening Check](#) and the [Phonological Awareness Diagnostic Assessment](#) to identify gaps in students’ knowledge of letter–sound relationships. She used this data to communicate to teachers how decodable texts aim to specifically target the identified gaps, and also explained how decodable texts can be aligned to the letter–sound relationships learnt in phonics lessons, providing more opportunities for students to strengthen their skills. As teachers have begun trialling the decodable texts, they have observed an improvement in students’ outcomes – which has led to a positive shift in teachers’ attitudes. The AP, C&I also uses research-based resources, such as the [What works best 2020 update](#) and the [What works best in practice](#) guide to upskill the teachers on the importance of using data to inform practice.



² Visit the [Decodable texts](#) page of the department’s website for more information.

Developing quality classroom-based practices for curriculum delivery

Tailoring support to staff needs

Providing tailored support in response to teachers' needs is a key strategy the AP, C&I uses to support the implementation of the new curriculum. Her tailored approach involves listening to what teachers need support with, and then putting structures in place to address their needs. Each week, the AP, C&I dedicates time to check in with the Year 1/2 teachers about their curriculum implementation experiences. For example, during the initial stages of implementation the teachers expressed their difficulty in creating a simplified teaching overview while using the sample units (refer to 'Resources to support curriculum implementation' text box). The AP, C&I responded accordingly by modelling how the teachers could use their existing A3 weekly overview to summarise the learning outcomes, lesson content and resources from the English sample units. She asked teachers to trial this strategy for 3 weeks before following up about how it was supporting them. Creating this structured approach to planning supported the teachers to refine the overview for their English programming and further extend a similar approach for their mathematics programming.

The AP, C&I has also been responsive to teachers asking for support by modelling how to set up organised reading group structures, providing formative assessment suggestions, and creating resources to reduce staff workload. The teachers report how valuable the AP, C&I's tailored approach has been in developing their confidence and ownership of teaching and learning in their classroom.



Navigating the new curriculum as a team

The Year 1/2 teachers attribute the success of exploring, planning and enacting the new curriculum to their collaborative, 2-person team approach. Tackling the new curriculum as a team reduced the teachers' initial feelings of uncertainty towards the changes. For example, as the sample units need to be adapted to suit their cohort of students, the 2 teachers share the planning and programming of the new syllabuses. This has been helpful in overcoming the challenges of having limited release time together and reducing workload. Having consistent teaching and learning programs across their classes also means that the pair can team teach the new syllabuses.

“... We split [the planning], Kristy did the English, I did the maths – we just put trust in each other. ... We just picked it based on our own strengths but it was way better when we were able to look at them together.”

Kat Granger, Teacher

The teachers report that implementing the curriculum together has strengthened their confidence to adapt to the curriculum changes. Their consistent planning and team-teaching approach were particularly valuable in 2022 because of increased staff absences due to COVID-19. The teachers have agreed that if one of them is absent, the other will 'take the lead' to join their classes together and support the relief teacher. This creates a sense of ease for both teachers, knowing that relieving teachers (who may be less familiar with the new curriculum) will be supported to ensure student learning progresses. The executive team also recognises how important the Year 1/2 teachers' mutual relationship of trust and support has been to the school's implementation success.

“[The two Year 1/2 teachers] have good teamwork between the two of them, I think that's why it's been successful.”

Leanne Swain, K-2 Assistant Principal



Adapting school structures and processes

Developing collective responsibility and shared understanding

At Walcha Central School, there is a core focus on providing a continual learning journey for students throughout their primary and secondary schooling. To achieve this, it is important for all staff to develop a collective sense of responsibility and shared understanding of implementing the new curriculum. This is particularly important in the primary cohort given that staff placements tend to vary from year to year at the school. The leadership team has been using the microlearning modules developed by the department (refer to 'Resources to support curriculum implementation' text box) to gradually inform staff of the changes so they have the knowledge and skills to teach the new syllabuses. Teachers are provided time in Kindergarten to Year 6 staff meetings to complete the microlearning modules. After completing each module, the AP, C&I dedicates time for reflective discussions where teachers answer targeted questions. In these meetings, the Year 1/2 teachers take an active role by sharing their implementation experiences, including where they started, lessons they have learnt along the way and where they are heading next. In addition to upskilling all Kindergarten to Year 6 staff, the AP, C&I has begun working with the high school leaders to inform the Year 7 to 12 teachers about the curriculum changes. Upskilling the high school teachers is important as they often relieve primary school staff during their RFF time.

Reorganising staff meetings to prioritise collaboration

Changing the purpose of staff meetings at the school has created additional time for staff to engage in collaborative curriculum implementation practices. Before implementation, the school changed the purpose of all staff meetings to focus on quality teaching and learning discussions rather than administration updates. This key decision supports the school's strategic direction in their Strategic Improvement Plan (2021–2024) to focus on strengthening quality teaching. This existing school priority has provided the Year 1/2 teachers with additional time in their weekly stage meeting to collaboratively plan for the new curriculum and engage in reflective discussions on student progress. The teachers emphasised the importance of collaborative planning to adopt a collective approach in teaching the new syllabuses, and to build their reciprocal relationship of trust. The principal also acknowledged the positive impact of creating time for collaborative planning, and how valuable it would have been to provide more planning sessions for the Year 1/2 teachers at the beginning of the year.

“... [Changing the purpose of stage meetings] really is around collaboration and whether that's collaboratively planning, collaboratively evaluating, looking at assessment, looking at programming, that's really become the focus of those meetings. It's not an administration meeting in any way.”

Amanda Cooper, Principal

Where to from here

The school plans to continue to upskill all Kindergarten to Year 12 staff to become familiar with the new syllabuses. In 2023, the school has been provided with the opportunity to trial the new 3–6 section of the K–10 English and mathematics syllabuses and sample units. They plan to adopt a similar professional learning approach, where teachers are provided with collaborative opportunities in Kindergarten to Year 6 staff meetings to complete microlearning modules and engage in reflective discussions. The school is also planning to use a similar approach in the Year 7 to 10 staff meetings to proactively engage staff about the secondary curriculum changes.

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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