

Schools: Language diversity in NSW Government schools, 2024



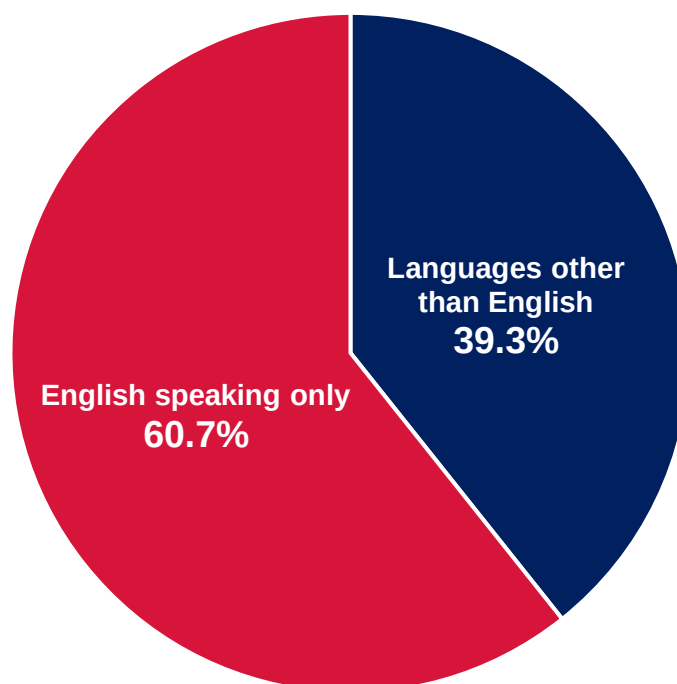
Language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) enrolments

In March 2024, more than a third (39.3%, 309,446) of students came from homes where languages other than English were spoken (Figure 1) by either the students and/or at least one parent or carer. 60.7% (477,983) of students enrolled in NSW Government schools came from homes where English was the only language spoken. 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data shows that 28.2% of the NSW population spoke a language other than English at home and 71.8% spoke only English.

Enrolment figures increased by 0.7 percentage points in 2024. This represents an increase of 3,177 LBOTE students, from 306,269 (38.6%) in 2023.

The proportion of LBOTE students has grown in the previous 10 years from 31.6% in 2014, to 39.3% in 2024 (7.7 percentage points). While 2021 and 2022 saw smaller increases in the LBOTE percentage (likely to be affected by reduced immigration due to COVID-19), increases from 2023 onwards are more comparable to the increases experienced in each of the 5 years prior to 2020.

Figure 1: Language background of students in NSW Government schools, March 2024



A student's country of origin cannot be inferred by their language background, as country of origin is where the student was born, while language background refers to the languages spoken by the student and their families. French, for example, is the official language of approximately 30 countries, with many more countries, including Australia, having French speakers as citizens and migrants.

Language breakdown

Students from language backgrounds other than English in NSW Government schools came from 247 different language backgrounds.

60.6% of all LBOTE enrolments came from 5 language backgrounds. Indian and Chinese (both comprised of several languages) accounted for 23.4% and 15.5% of students from a language background other than English respectively. The other main language backgrounds were Arabic (13.0%), Vietnamese (5.2%) and Filipino/Tagalog (3.5%).

Arabic

In 2024, the largest single language spoken by LBOTE students and/or their parents/carers was Arabic, with 40,290 enrolments (13.0% of all LBOTE students).

Indian languages

Collectively, Indian languages accounted for 23.4% of all LBOTE students. Of the 25 Indian languages reported, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Punjabi, Nepali and Gujarati, each represented the backgrounds of more than 5,000 students.

There were 5 other Indian languages with more than 1,000 LBOTE students each at NSW Government schools in 2024 – Telugu, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Marathi and Kannada. Refer to Note 2 for a list of Indian languages with fewer than 1,000 students.

Chinese languages

Students from a Chinese language background made up 15.5% of LBOTE students in 2024 (47,831 students), with the largest number of students (31,541 or 10.2%) coming from a Mandarin speaking background. There were also 13,454 students from a Cantonese background and 2,836 students from other Chinese language backgrounds, including Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Wu, and Chinese Other.

Notable increases

Aside from the 5 top language backgrounds, 6 languages in 2024 increased by more than 5% and 100 enrolments from 2023. The increases were particularly high for Mongolian, which recorded a second consecutive increase of more than 40% (49.1%), followed by Nepali (11.6%), Dari (11.6%), Persian (excluding Dari) (8.3%), Malayalam (7.4%) and Tagalog (6.6%).

Of the Indian Languages in 2024, only Nepali showed an increase of more than 5% and 100 enrolments (11.6%) with Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and Telugu registering increases of 4.7%, 3.6%, 3.6% and 3.1% respectively.

Aboriginal English enrolments increased by 85 enrolments (6%) in 2024. Mandarin recorded the greatest increase of 1,177 enrolments, or 3.9%.

Figure 2: Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools by region/language groupings, March 2024

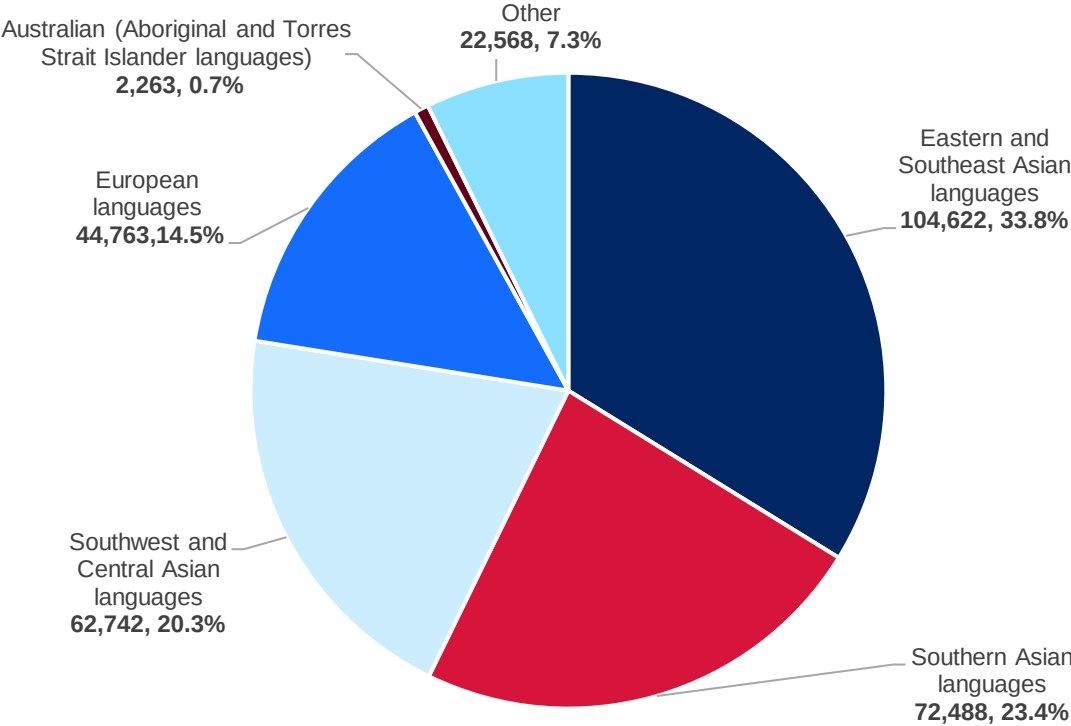


Figure 3(a): Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools – languages with over 1,000 speakers, March 2024

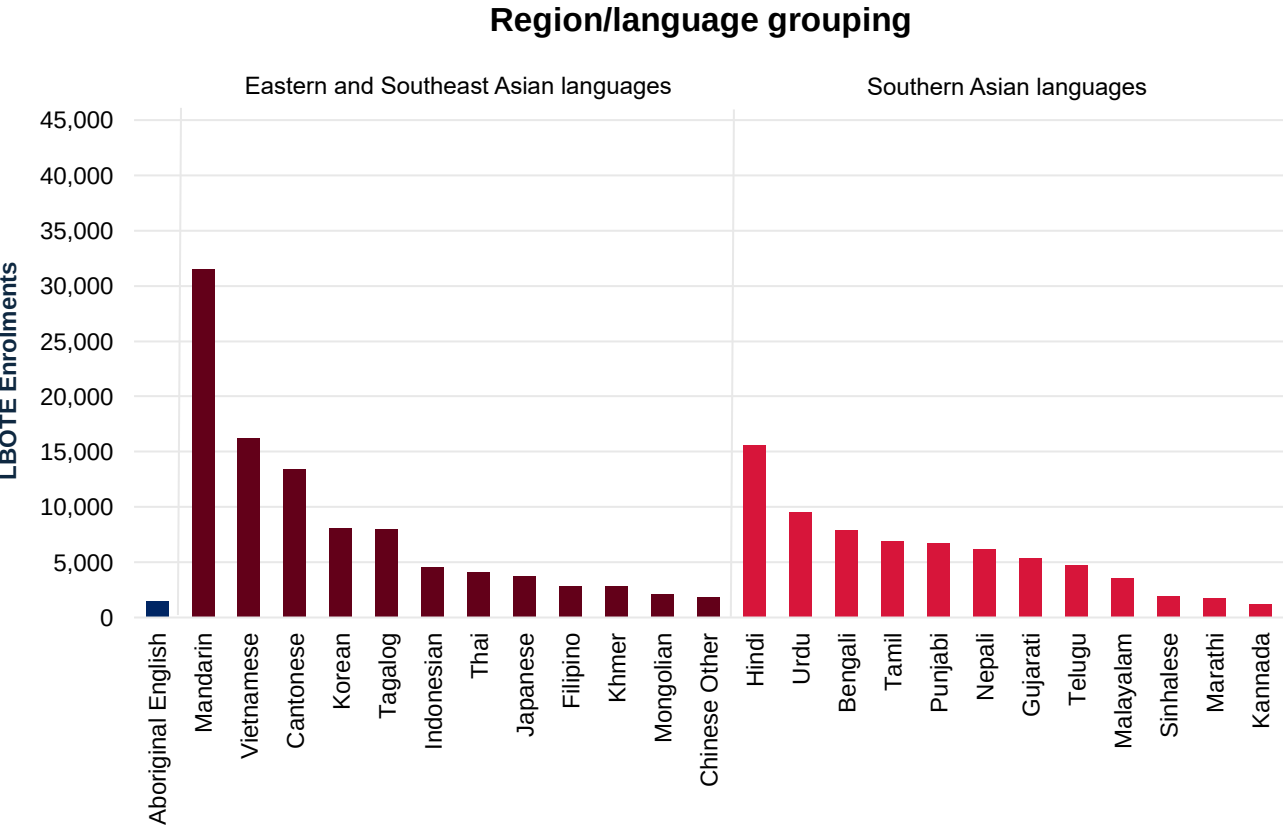
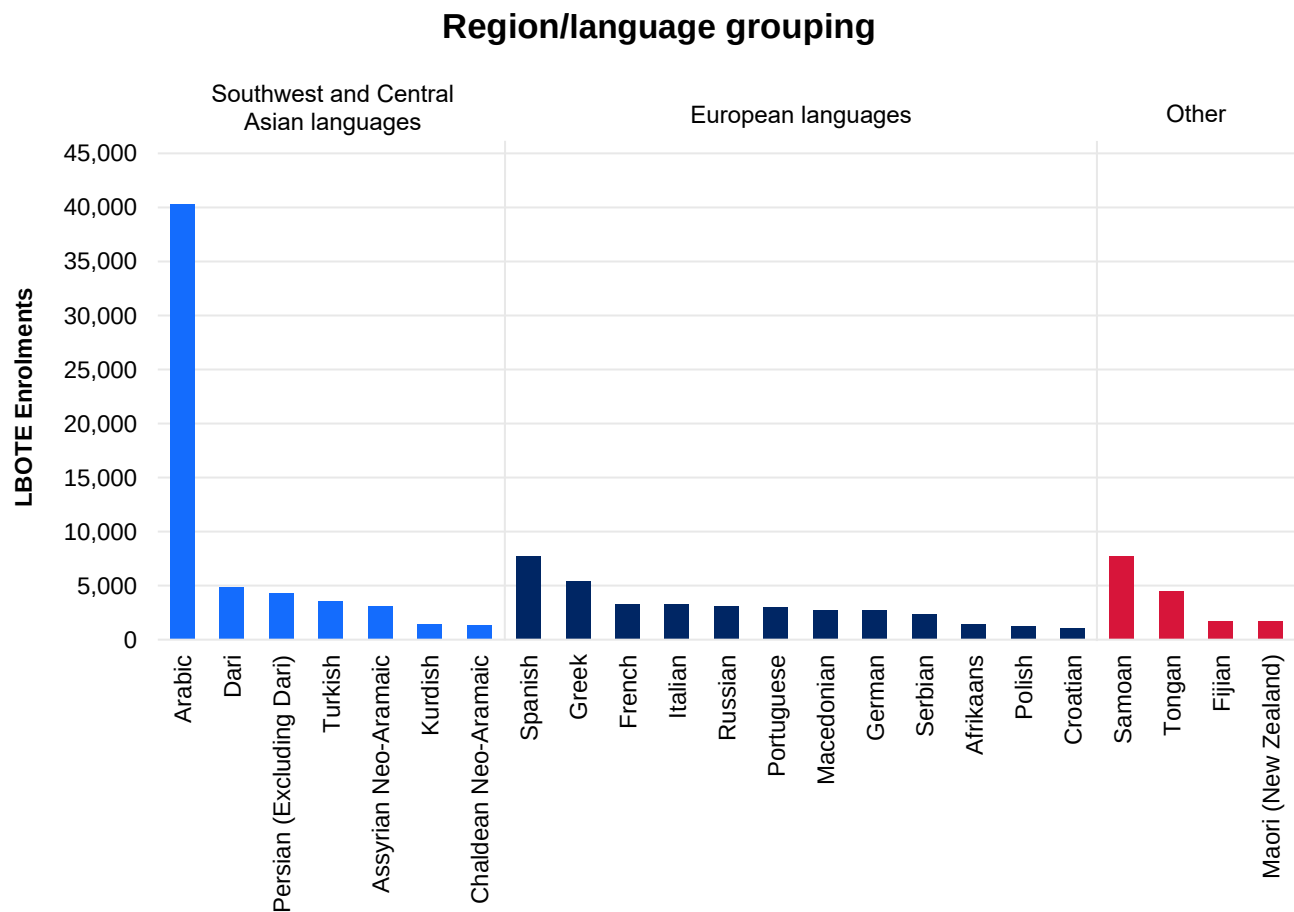


Figure 3(b): Language backgrounds in NSW Government schools – languages with over 1,000 speakers, March 2024.



Diversity in language background of students has remained relatively stable since 2014, ranging between 240 language backgrounds in 2014 to 247 in 2024.

For more information visit [‘Enrolments of LBOTE government school students by largest language groups’](#) on the NSW Department of Education Insights Hub.

Largest language backgrounds other than English, 2014 to 2024

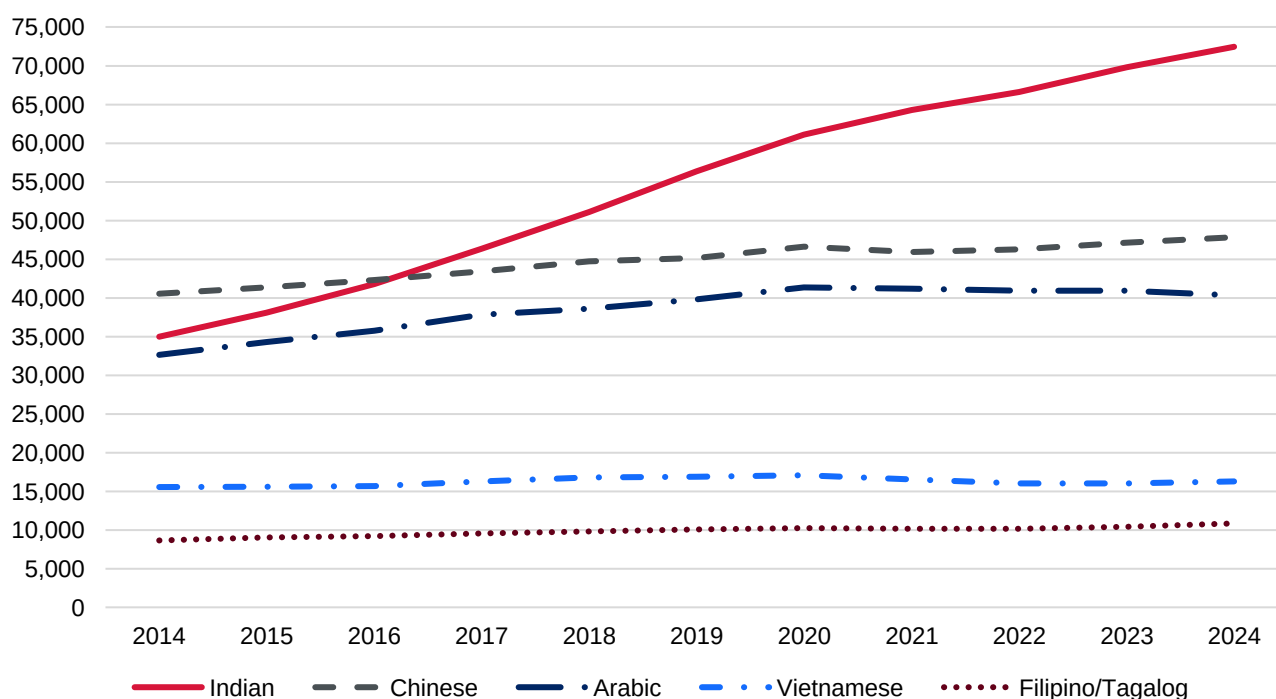
At the time of the 2021 ABS census, 26 language backgrounds accounted for more than 1% each and 80.3% total of all language backgrounds other than English across NSW.

In March 2024, NSW Government school students came from 30 language backgrounds where each accounted for more than 1% (or approximately 3,000 students). These languages represent 81.0% of all LBOTE students. There were 48 languages which more than 1,000 students identified as their language background.

Enrolment of students from Indian language background increased by 37,468 students (107.1%) from 2014 to 2024. Of the other 5 largest language groups, Arabic rose by 7,662 (23.5%), Chinese languages rose by 7,302 (18.0%), Filipino/Tagalog rose by 2,201 (25.%%) and Vietnamese rose by 696 (4.5%) in the same timeframe.

Enrolment of students from an Aboriginal English language background has increased consistently in the last 10 years, from 481 in 2014 to 1,512 in 2024. This is possibly due to the impact of the system-wide focus on raising awareness of Aboriginal EALD learners including Aboriginal English speakers in the last 10 years.

Figure 4: Five largest language backgrounds other than English, 2014–2024



For more information visit '[Schools: language diversity in NSW](#)' on the NSW Department of Education Insights Hub.

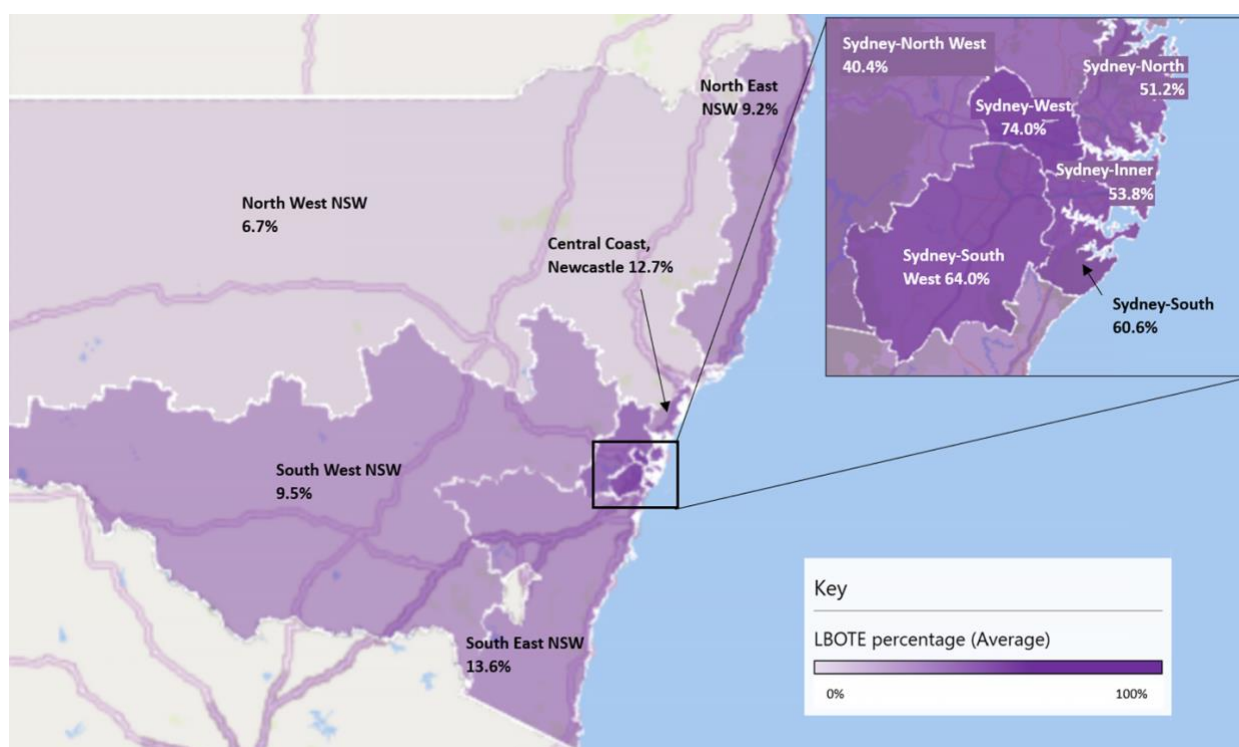
LBOTE enrolments in NSW Government schools by Statistical Area Level 4 groupings

The map below shows the concentration of LBOTE students across NSW, using a geographical structure based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. The ASGS is maintained by the ABS and is widely used as it allows comparison of statistical data. ASGS Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) boundaries in NSW have been combined by the NSW Department of Education into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

There were greater concentrations of LBOTE students in the Sydney metropolitan area than in other parts of NSW. Across all Sydney schools, 58.6% of the students were from language backgrounds other than English compared with 10.6% of enrolments in regional NSW.

Details of the SA4 groupings are included in the notes at the end of the fact sheet.

Map 1: LBOTE as a percentage of total enrolments by SA4 groupings, March 2024



At 74.0%, Sydney-West remained the area with the largest percentage of students from a language background other than English. The areas with the next largest percentages of LBOTE students were Sydney-South West (64.0%) and Sydney-South (60.6%). South East NSW had the highest percentage of LBOTE students (13.6%) in Regional NSW. The area with the lowest percentage of LBOTE students across NSW was North West NSW with 6.7%.

Table 1: LBOTE enrols by Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) and education level, March 2024

SA4 group	Primary total	Secondary total	All enrolments	Percentage LBOTE
Sydney-Inner	15,717	13,756	29,669	53.8%
Sydney-North	26,724	17,127	44,055	51.2%
Sydney-South	25,452	18,703	44,635	60.6%
Sydney-South West	32,948	25,914	59,295	64.0%
Sydney-West	45,534	25,028	71,099	74.0%
Sydney-North West	16,514	10,538	27,203	40.4%
Sydney total	162,889	111,066	275,956	58.6%
North East NSW	3,229	1,916	5,153	9.2%
North West NSW	2,559	1,693	4,277	6.7%
South West NSW	2,931	1,753	4,752	9.5%
South East NSW	5,708	3,715	9,494	13.6%
Central Coast, Newcastle	5,559	4,191	9,814	12.7%
Regional total	19,986	13,268	33,490	10.6%
NSW total	182,875	124,334	309,446	39.3%

Note: 'All enrolments' is greater than the total of the primary and secondary columns, as it includes ungraded students.

For more information visit '[Enrolment of LBOTE students in NSW Government schools by SA4 groupings](#)' on the NSW Department of Education Insights Hub.

Language backgrounds of newly arrived students in NSW Government schools

Languages spoken by 'new arrival' students are counted on a different basis from LBOTE. The count in Table 2 is based on the main languages spoken by the students, while the LBOTE count includes students who speak another language and/or those with a parent/carer who speaks another language. New arrivals data is collected through the English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) annual census, conducted in June each year.

The total number of new arrival students in 2023 was 8,185 and they spoke 133 different languages. Arabic was the most common single language, accounting for 8.7% of these students. However, 22.0% of new arrival students spoke an Indian language, and 18.3% spoke a Chinese language.

Table 2: Main languages spoken by new arrival students, 2023

Language	New arrival students	Percentage of new arrival students
Indian languages	1,802	22.0%
Hindi	397	4.9%
Urdu	240	2.9%
Nepali	201	2.5%
Tamil	181	2.2%
Telugu	173	2.1%
Punjabi	131	1.6%
Bengali	114	1.4%
Malayalam	105	1.3%
Indian (other)	260	3.2%
Chinese languages	1,495	18.3%
Mandarin	1,183	14.5%
Cantonese	237	2.9%
Chinese (other)	75	0.9%
Arabic	711	8.7%
Vietnamese	529	6.5%
Mongolian	515	6.3%
Dari	369	4.5%
Tagalog/Filipino	318	3.9%
Persian (excluding Dari)	218	2.7%
Spanish	180	2.2%

Language	New arrival students	Percentage of new arrival students
Korean	167	2.0%
Kurdish	153	1.9%
Indonesian	128	1.6%
Portuguese	120	1.5%
Japanese	112	1.4%
Thai	110	1.3%
Other languages	1,258	15.4%
NSW Total	8,185	100.0%

Notes:

- From 2016, new arrivals data up to June is collected through the EAL/D annual census conducted in June every year. Complete data is not available until the following year.
- New arrivals are defined as students who are enrolling in an Australian school for the first time, 6 months of arriving in Australia (18 months for Kindergarten), speak a language other than English as their first language, and are in need of intensive EAL/D instruction.

Further information

The [NSW Department of Education Insights Hub](#) provides further information on LBOTE student enrolments, including data for previous years, data underpinning the figures in this fact sheet and additional information such as breakdowns of LBOTE enrolments by scholastic year.

Definitions

Language background other than English (LBOTE)

A student is considered to have a language background other than English if the student, their parent(s) or other primary caregiver(s) speak a language other than English at home. For example, a student who only speaks English, but whose parent or primary caregiver speaks another language, will be included in the collection.

For students who speak multiple languages at home, priority is given first to the primary language spoken by the student, and then the language spoken by caregivers. On the enrolment form and in the department's enrolment and registration number (ERN) system, the primary language is recorded for parent 1, then the language for parent 2 (in that order). LBOTE students may come from different countries within the same language background; have varying levels of literacy in their first language; can be multilingual; may speak English as a first language, fluently or with varying levels of proficiency; have differing prior schooling experiences; and represent various socioeconomic and family circumstances.

Aboriginal English

Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English spoken by many Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Aboriginal English differs from other dialects of English in linguistic structure (sentence formation and word meanings) and cultural usage.

Note: The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), through the addition of the 'D' in EAL/D, has intentionally included students who speak a variety of Aboriginal English as their first language, and who do not yet have full proficiency in Standard Australian English, as part of the cohort that requires targeted classroom support.

Explanatory notes

The census of students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) was conducted on 1 March 2024 in all NSW Government schools, including preschools, Intensive English Centres and distance education centres.

Since 1996, information on LBOTE students has been collected in the first half of the school year. Until 2012, comparative enrolment information for all students was extracted from the School Entitlement System (February enrolment data) and this was the basis of the LBOTE proportion previously published in 'Schools: Language diversity in NSW, 2012'. From 2013, comparative enrolment information for all students is extracted from the enrolment and registration number (ERN) system in March, at the time the LBOTE data is collected.

1. Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)

For information on languages, refer to Australian Standard Classification of Languages, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ASCL catalogue 1267.0).

2. Combined language groups

Other Indian languages with less than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2024 include Konkani (ASCL 5204), Fijian Hindustani (ASCL 5217), Sindhi, (ASCL 5208), Oriya (ASCL 5216), Tulu (ASCL 5105), Indo-Aryan not further defined (ASCL 5200), Assamese (ASCL 5213), Kashmiri, (ASCL 5215), Dhivehi (ASCL 5214), Dravidian/Dravidian (Other) (ASCL 5199), and Other Southern Asian languages (ASCL 5999).

Other Chinese languages with less than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2024 include Teochew, Hokkien (ASCL 7107), Hakka (ASCL 7102), Wu (ASCL 7106) and Chinese, not elsewhere classified (ASCL 7199).

Filipino (ASCL 6512) and Tagalog (ASCL 6511) have been combined into one language group.

The 'Assyrian & Chaldean' language group includes Assyrian Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4206), Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (ASCL 4207), and Assyrian (ASCL 4203).

'Other languages' groups are those languages (not mentioned above) with fewer than 1,000 total LBOTE students in 2024 or 100 new arrival students in 2023.

3. Statistical Area Level 4 groupings

Data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. ASGS Statistical Area 4 (SA4) have been combined into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

Name of SA4 groupings	SA4 name
Sydney-North	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby, Sydney - Northern Beaches, Sydney - Ryde
Sydney-Inner	Sydney - City and Inner South, Sydney - Eastern Suburbs, Sydney - Inner West
Sydney-South	Sydney - Inner South West, Sydney - Sutherland
Sydney-South West	Sydney - Outer South West, Sydney - South West
Sydney-West	Sydney - Blacktown, Sydney - Parramatta
Sydney-North West	Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury, Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains
North East NSW	Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Mid North Coast, Richmond - Tweed
North West NSW	Far West and Orana, Hunter Valley excluding Newcastle, New England and North West
South West NSW	Central West, Murray, Riverina
South East NSW	Capital Region, Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven
Central Coast, Newcastle	Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie