Using the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to support continuity of learning

This document aims to help those involved in children’s transition to school, including Prep teachers and school leadership teams, to learn more about how a holistic consideration of children’s development enhances the transition-to-school process. It also aims to encourage the use of the AEDC to gain an understanding of how children are developing, at a community level, according to the five domains:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge.

These domains have been shown to predict later health, wellbeing and academic success. The AEDC data provides an indication of which developmental areas are on track and which areas require further support for children in the school community. Research consistently tells us that identifying developmental concerns and providing customised support in the early years increases the chances of developmental concerns being overcome. Schools have an important role to play in this process (AEDC, 2015).

This guide offers suggestions on how the five AEDC domains could be utilised to support holistic development and continuity of learning for young children transitioning to school.

The student is at the centre of school policy, planning and practice. From a holistic perspective, this includes consideration of their physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, as well as cognitive aspects of their learning. For students to develop and learn, they first need to feel that they belong. This guide is subsequently designed with belonging as a foundational concept to holistic learning and development for children transitioning to school. To support and optimise students’ holistic learning and development, careful attention should be paid to how belonging relates to three central concepts:

1. the selection of relevant people and the nature of these collaborative relationships
2. identification of suitable inclusive and responsive places for learning and development
3. responsive teaching and learning practices.

This guide will explore these central concepts in three parts:

- **Part one** – the foundational concept of belonging and its significance to holistic learning.
- **Part two** – evidence of positive early childhood development, reflective questions and suggested strategies and opportunities (at both community and classroom levels) under the categories of people, places and practices, and action areas from the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool.
- **Part three** – a range of relevant resources for schools to support students’ development, in collaboration with families and community partners.
A sense of belonging is about feeling connected with people, places, ideas, beliefs and ways of doing and learning. Belonging refers to the relational dimension of personal identity, and the right to have one’s cultural identity respected and preserved (Woodhead & Booker, 2011). In Indigenous knowledges, belonging to country is a foundational way of being and knowing. Therefore, a sense of belonging is an important need that affects young children’s everyday experiences, wellbeing and happiness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Stratigos, 2015).

Children who experience a greater sense of belonging and holistic wellbeing are more likely to learn in effective ways, and engage in healthy and fulfilling social practices (Skevington et al, 2003).

A sense of belonging is nurtured when:
- children’s needs and rights are recognised
- children are protected and provided for
- children are cared for, respected and included
- children have opportunities to express personal agency and creativity
- children feel able to contribute, to love and care for others
- children fulfil responsibilities
- children identify with personal and community activities
- children share in collective celebrations (Woodhead & Booker, 2011, p.3).

The development of a sense of belonging is an explicit goal of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia. It is central with the companion concepts of being and becoming, in that belonging ‘shapes who children are and who they can become’ (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 7). Starting school introduces children to new people, places and practices to familiarise with and develop a sense of belonging. Belonging is therefore recognised as the foundational concept to support successful transitions to school and continuity in holistic learning.

Reflective questions
These questions are designed to help teachers, students and their families reflect on how to develop students’ sense of belonging in the school and classroom:
- In what ways does the school and classroom welcome all students?
- In what ways do all students see their culture welcomed in the school environment, curriculum, events, policies and practices?
- Who is included and who is excluded?
- In what ways can students demonstrate where and to what they belong?
- What everyday practices contribute to a sense of belonging?

Positive self-identity
A secure sense of belonging is reflected through a positive self-identity. Positive self-identity supports the AEDC domains of physical health and wellbeing, social competence and emotional maturity. There are psychological theories that recognise how both internal and external factors influence how children view themselves and how good they are at adapting to change.

An easy-going temperament and good self-regulation (defined as the ability to identify, express and manage behaviour and emotions) are recognised as protective internal factors that influence self-identity and adaptation to change (Eisenberg, et al., 2003). External factors, such as the feedback we receive from other people and how our identity is reflected in society, also influence how children view themselves and their ability to respond to changes in their environment.
Evidence of positive self-identity

• Positive expectations of self
• Hopefulness about the future
• Confidently engages in learning, creativity and play
• A sense of independence
• Good communication, problem-solving and social skills
• An ability to develop positive and lasting relationships with friends and family.

Having a positive self-identity is about seeing oneself as a successful learner and being willing and able to contribute to the learning community. All children have the right to develop a positive self-identity about their name, gender, family, clan, tribe, culture, spirituality and nationality. In recognition of this, the first of five outcomes identified by the EYLF is ‘Children have a strong sense of identity’. This acknowledges that identity underpins personal wellbeing, social competence and learning success.

Community suggestions

• Invite parents and carers to share their hopes and dreams for their children.
• Ask students what their hopes and dreams are for their future.

Reflective questions

• How do students express their identities?
• How are cultural and spiritual diversities of identity welcomed?
• Which students and families have the confidence to contribute in the school community? Which don’t? How could all students and families develop this confidence?

Classroom ideas*

In the Foundation Year, the Australian Curriculum focuses on developing students’ understanding of their personal worlds, including their personal and family histories, and the places they and their families live in and belong. The emphasis is on the student’s own history and their own place. Students will explore why places are special to them and others.

• Name stories – to honour self and cultural identity, students orally share the story behind their name or nicknames. Record and display students’ name stories in the classroom.

* Activities listed under classroom ideas support the AEDC domains as well as a range of age-appropriate pedagogies characteristics and learning areas of the Australian Curriculum Foundation Year.
Part two: Building belonging and promoting positive development

Child development research (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012) has found that internal factors such as self-confidence, hope and optimism, and external factors such as positive relationships and an inclusive environment, operate together to promote adaptability to change. In psychology, these are referred to as protective factors because they are understood to protect children when exposed to challenging life experiences. Starting school is a significant, and sometimes challenging change in a young child’s life. The AEDC school and community data identifies those developmental domains that require further support to enable children to make smooth transitions to school, and to nurture their positive self-identity and sense of belonging. The following information details considerations about the relevant people, places and practices that may optimise development and learning for children in your community.

People

This guide applies two key action areas from the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool:
• Respect for diversity
• Reciprocal relationships.

When planning to address the AEDC domain/s that require further support in your school’s community, these two key action areas can be considered. To provide children with strong foundations for their schooling, they require secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships. Their diverse backgrounds should also be respected.

Respect for diversity

Biology, culture and environment all influence children’s development. Queensland children come from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, each with varying cultural values towards children and learning. For example, some may value independence, which will see children encouraged to self-care from a young age, whilst others may value community, in which everyone looks out for each other (regardless of age) and food and schooling resources are shared. Home and community environments also vary hugely, providing differing opportunities for children’s development and learning. School and class practices can be shaped to be respectful of students’ cultures and home lives, so students feel they are accepted and that they belong. Awareness and acknowledgement of the goals, expectations and child rearing practices of families is essential to ensure culturally responsive practices for diverse families.

Reflective questions
• How well do you know the cultural and contextual needs of the children and families in your community?
• How do cultural values, practices and environments vary for students in your class?
• How does your school ensure equitable access to learning for all students?
• In what ways do classroom practices reflect and respect the cultural and contextual practices and needs of the students and families of the class?

Community suggestions
• To learn how transition strategies can be more inclusive, make contact with community leaders and Elders to hear community aspirations for children.
• Design orientation and transition programs with community leaders’ and Elders’ input to respect diversity.
• Invite families to share their cultural values about raising children at enrolment.
• Meal sharing can be an easy entry into culture sharing, along with songs and music.
• Work with children, their families, ECEC services and relevant support organisations (for example, Autism Queensland, Deaf Services Queensland) to ensure the school is ready and equipped to support all students as successful learners.
Classroom ideas

During the Prep Year, students learn about their personal world. This means learning about how their own heritage and their own place contribute to their sense of identity and belonging. Below are some examples that demonstrate how these learnings can take place in the context of the Australian Curriculum.

• Classroom environment – represent students’ cultures authentically in class displays.
  - Invite each student’s family to bring in a photo or some artefact that reflects their family, to feature as part of the class environment. To ensure every family can bring in a photo, offer to take the photo at drop-off or pick-up time.
  - Adapt the classroom to support the diverse needs of the students, for example with braille signage and easy access pathways. Cultural variations in eating practices could be accommodated in the class’s responsive routine.

• Student-curated museum – students gather artefacts that document their lives, such as self and family photos, items of interest collected on walks, cultural artefacts, and drawings and sculptures.
  - For an example, see www.jarjumslifemuseum.com
  - ‘It boosted their self-confidence, social skills, as well as their literacy skills and picked up on their oral language, their confidence, and the words they were using …this was something different we have not seen so far’ (Prep teacher).

• Persona dolls – these are dolls that have a persona (age, gender, ethnicity, class, ability) and can be used to openly tell stories, role-play, discuss and collectively resolve belonging issues pertaining to diversity.
  Story writing and writing letters to the doll can emerge from the encounters. For more information see www/personadoll.uk/

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships is a central principle of the EYLF and the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool. When students feel the security of reciprocal relationships they can more easily adapt to change in their learning environment. Consider all relevant relationships, including family members, Elders, peers, teachers, administration and facilities staff, health workers and community members. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships can be nurtured through:

• respecting student and families’ rights, cultural values and practices
• providing consistent care and support
• supporting clear and open communication with students and their parents or carers
• modelling respectful relationships with colleagues
• encouraging students to care for one another.
Reflective questions

• What attributes of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships do I value?
• How can my school enhance respectful relationships with students and families, especially with hard-to-reach families?
• How well do I know the rights, cultural values and practices of the students in my class to ensure that I respect these in my interactions?
• How do I show care, compassion and understanding for all students in my class?
• What expectations and conditions have I established that promote students in my class to support one another?
• How do I know that students feel comfortable to ask for assistance from teachers or peers when needed?

Community suggestions

• Focus on building relationships with children and families before starting school.
• Network with ECEC services and family programs in your community to build relationships.
• Have children visit Prep classes multiple times at the end of the year before they start school, for children, families and teachers to get to know each other.
• Invite ECEC services to school social gatherings and events.

Classroom idea

• Picture books – sharing books can provide varying perspectives and important key messages on belonging to cultivate positive class relationships, social competence and emotional maturity.
• Some recommendations are:

Places

The influence of environments on children’s wellbeing, development and learning is widely recognised in both health and education. For children to adapt well to change, they require safe, secure and supportive environments in their home, early years’ service, school and community. These environments:

• include familiar elements (for example, in the school, this might be furniture, imagery, and toys)
• are free of stress
• are emotionally warming and supportive
• are relational
• are culturally and community connected
• are child-friendly – appealing to children’s interests and sense of wonder
• include harmony and balance of the whole space.

Attention to learning environments as welcoming spaces is a key practice in the EYLF. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* also recognise the importance of the environment. The reflective questions below will help you to think about the ways in which the school and classroom environment nurture students’ sense of belonging.

Reflective questions

• What elements of familiarity are in place for every student?
• How is the place welcoming for all students and families?
• What opportunities are there for students and families to feel comfortable in and connected to the place?
• What opportunities are there for students and families to have their cultures reflected in the place?
• How can places enhance warmth, relationality and calmness?
• How can the classroom be adapted to enhance development and learning in AEDC domain/s of need?
Community suggestions
• Invite families to share community places of significance – places they visit frequently.
• Visit local early childhood services to make links to school environments and support continuity.
• For students who require allied health services (such as occupational therapy or speech therapy), visit these services to see what environmental features could be continued in the classroom.

Classroom idea
• Collaboratively plan and co-construct classroom spaces with students to draw on their agency as contributors to the learning environment and to foster a sense of belonging and ownership. Utilise both indoor and outdoor spaces to support all domains of development and learning.

Practices
School and class practices can help students to feel they belong, and to confidently and productively develop and learn. Young children need lots of reassurance from caring adults to help them cope with major changes, such as transitioning to school. Remember, familiarity offers a sense of security in knowing. The age-appropriate pedagogies conceptual framework supports teacher pedagogical decision-making that takes into account students’ interests, strengths, and capabilities when shaping learning experiences that enact the content of the Australian Curriculum. A brief summary of the key characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies is provided below, but for more information on the age-appropriate pedagogies program, including a full description of the conceptual framework, download the 2016 progress report from www.det.qld.gov.au/ageappropriatepedagogies

Effective pedagogy
Age-appropriate pedagogies comprise 11 characteristics of effective pedagogy to support teaching and learning practices in the early years of school. These characteristics shape the look and feel of teaching and learning in early years classrooms, and are drawn from contemporary research literature about effective pedagogies for teaching young children. Age-appropriate pedagogies take account of children’s holistic development and recognise the connection between learning and development in supporting students’ success, now and in their future learning. Because of the focus on holistic development, learning experiences informed by age-appropriate pedagogies support students’ continued development in areas reflective of the AEDC domains. The characteristics and approaches of age-appropriate pedagogies are listed below.

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<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Approaches</th>
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<td>Active</td>
<td>Inquiry learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learner focused</td>
<td>Play-based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agentic</td>
<td>Direct teaching/instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Event-based</td>
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<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Project</td>
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<td>Playful</td>
<td>Blended</td>
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<td>Creative</td>
<td>Explicit instruction</td>
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<td>Explicit instruction</td>
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A range of age-appropriate pedagogies resources are available to assist in guiding the selection of characteristics and approaches to complement the Australian Curriculum content being taught. Students are at the centre of pedagogical decision-making and by focusing on their capabilities, interests and motivations, teachers can select approaches and characteristics that may strengthen development in areas aligned to the AEDC domains and enhance students’ sense of belonging.

Reflective questions
• When teaching the Australian Curriculum, which characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies can you select to foster students’ sense of belonging?
• How could you collaborate with local ECEC services to develop shared understandings about the pedagogical practices required to support continuity?
• How comfortable and confident are you in using the characteristics and approaches of age-appropriate pedagogies in your practice?
• What opportunities are there for you to explore the application of age-appropriate pedagogies in your teaching?
• How can you adjust your pedagogical approach to meet varying cultural and developmental needs?
Community suggestions

- Invite children’s ECEC teachers and families to share pedagogies in key projects and learning achievements, and identify the connections with practice in the Prep year.
- Reflect on children’s learning and development and your pedagogical practice with an early childhood professional community (school-based or beyond).
- Connect with allied health professionals to consult and collaborate on effective pedagogies for students with additional needs.

Classroom ideas

- Invite students to articulate how they like to learn and how they feel when engaged in these ways of learning.
- Allow opportunities for students to provide input into aspects of a current unit of work.

Effective use of data

The Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool identifies how data can be used to effectively support transitions across three levels: school-centred, consultative and collaborative. A collaborative approach provides optimal benefit for children’s positive development and learning in transitioning to school, in that data is sourced and interpreted by all stakeholders (school, ECEC services, children, families, allied health professionals) thereby offering multiple and holistic perspectives. View the school and community AEDC profiles with stakeholders and collaboratively determine what other data sources might reveal a fuller understanding of the children’s developmental needs. Consider both community-level and child-level data, then collaboratively plan to differentiate teaching and learning to support continuity of learning. Be sure to focus on the action areas of respect for diversity, reciprocal relationships and responsive environments.

Reflective questions

- Does your school take a school-centred approach or a collaborative approach to data usage?
- What available cultural, community and health data is relevant to families in your community?
- How could you facilitate a collaborative approach? With whom might you collaborate?
- What are the limitations of the AEDC data? What can it tell you about students in your school or classroom, and what can’t it tell you?
- What other data sources might help you in understanding the needs of students in your school and supporting their ongoing learning?

Community suggestions

- Plan a local early childhood network meeting to discuss AEDC school and community profiles. Identify strengths and domains that require further support.
- Collate data that may provide more community context as to potential causes for declines or improvements. Your regional Transition, Partnership and Innovation Officers and local city council can be a good resource for community data.

Classroom ideas

- Use the information in students’ transition statements (in consultation with ECEC service and families) to inform planning for pedagogical practices that promote continuity of learning.
- Ask students about their likes, challenges and expectations through conversations, drawings and role-play.

To conclude, if people, places and practices operate collectively to nurture belonging, students will feel:

- secure
- recognised
- that they fit in
- able to participate in active ongoing learning (Woodhead & Booker, 2011).
### Part three: Links to related resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AEDC domains</th>
<th>Relevant resources</th>
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</table>
| **Physical health and wellbeing**     | • [Department of Health: Get up and grow](#)  
  A program about healthy eating and physical activity including posters, cook books and staff and parent guides. There is also a staff handbook specific to the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.  

  • [Department of Health: Move and play every day](#)  
  A fact sheet on the Australian physical activity guidelines for children aged zero to five.  

  • [Nutrition Australia](#)  
  A website full of healthy eating and lifestyle information and recipes for teachers and parents.  

  • [Early Childhood Australia: Children’s health and nutrition](#)  
  Fact sheets, webpage links and information on a range of topics affecting physical health and wellbeing.  

  • [Queensland Government: Daily physical activity guide](#)  
  A how-to manual on children’s daily physical activity needs for schools. |
| **Social competence**                  | • [Kids Matter: Resources for educators and families](#)  
  A wide range of information for families and childhood educators, including interactive professional learning guides, e-books, posters and other useful resources.  

  • [Raising Children’s Network](#)  
  Offers parents articles and resources on a range of issues relevant for raising socially competent children.  

  • [Kids Count](#)  
  Developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation, this website for parents and carers provides useful information about supporting children’s social development.  

  • [Hunter Institute for Mental Health: Connections](#)  
  A resource to help educators support children’s wellbeing. |
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<td><strong>Emotional maturity</strong></td>
<td>• <a href="#">The Australian Psychological Society: Tip sheets</a> Information on a range of topics related to children’s mental health.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <a href="#">Australian Childhood Foundation</a> Resources on mindful and connected parenting, foster care, child abuse and more.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <a href="#">Beyond Blue: Helpful contacts and websites</a> Provides access to health care professionals and information on mental health from a range of sources.</td>
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<td>• <a href="#">Kids Matter, Resources for Educators and Families</a> This website offers a wide range of resources to assist educators, families, community members and professionals with issues relating to mental health.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <a href="#">Women’s and Children’s Health Network: Grief and loss</a> Information on children experiencing grief and loss.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language and cognitive skills</strong></td>
<td>• <a href="#">Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA)</a> Australia’s peak organisation for literacy education. A range of ALEA resources and links to other key Australian websites for supporting literacy education in primary school. One of ALEA’s journals, Practical Literacy: the early and primary years, provides practical teaching ideas in three issues annually.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(school-based)</td>
<td>• <a href="#">Early Start and the P-10 Literacy Continuum</a> A video resource that demonstrates how Early Start and the P-10 Literacy Continuum are connected, and how they can support planning to further teaching and learning (access via the Learning Place).</td>
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<td>• <a href="#">National Literacy and Numeracy week</a> Australian Government site for Literacy and Numeracy week that is packed with a range of literacy and numeracy activities, websites and videos for a range of year levels.</td>
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<td>• <a href="#">Queensland Government: Foundations for Success</a> A practical guideline to extend and enrich learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the kindergarten year. The guideline supports educators to implement a program that connects with families and communities and builds on the cultural knowledge, strengths and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</td>
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<td>• <a href="#">Mem Fox website</a> Information from the well-loved Australian author for parents and educators, suggestions for reading and read-aloud stories.</td>
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| Communication skills and general knowledge | • **Early Childhood Australia**  
Fact sheets and information for both teachers and parents on a range of topics affecting communication skills and general knowledge.  
• **Australian Broadcasting Corporation: ABC splash**  
A website that includes links to multimedia resources, games, shows and information for parents and educators.  
• **Raising Children’s Network: Teaching skills to children: different approaches**  
Offers parents and teachers advice on different ways of communicating new skills and knowledge to children. This is particularly important because, as well as learning new information, children will learn different methods of communicating their own ideas.  
• **Queensland Government: Speaking Promotes Education and Knowledge (SPEAK)**  
An app that provides activities, ideas and information for parents, carers and educators to support and nurture language development in children from birth to six years of age. |

References


## Appendix A — Curriculum mapping

The following table maps which elements of the Australian Curriculum, EYLF, and the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline (QKLG) address the AEDC domains to support holistic development and continuity of learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AEDC domains</th>
<th>EYLF</th>
<th>QKLG</th>
<th>Australian Curriculum</th>
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<td><strong>Physical health and wellbeing</strong></td>
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<td>Wellbeing</td>
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<td><strong>Outcome 4:</strong> Children are confident and involved learners</td>
<td>Active learning</td>
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<td><strong>Social competence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcome 1:</strong> Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>All learning areas and general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.</td>
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<td><strong>Outcome 2:</strong> Children are connected with and contribute to their world</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
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<td><strong>Outcome 4:</strong> Children are confident and involved learners</td>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Outcome 5:</strong> Children are effective communicators</td>
<td>Active learning</td>
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<td><strong>Emotional maturity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcome 1:</strong> Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>All learning areas and general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.</td>
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<td>(school-based)</td>
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