

Koorie cultural inclusion

"Victoria will be a state where the rich and thriving culture, knowledge and experience of our First Nations Peoples are celebrated by all Victorians, where our universal systems are inclusive of Koorie people at every stage of their journey; and where every Koorie person achieves their potential, succeeds in life and feels strong in cultural identity."

Vision statement [Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026](#)

OVERVIEW

This Professional Practice Note supports teachers and school leaders to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural inclusion, as an enabling foundation for learning in all Victorian government schools.

The [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes](#) (FISO) clearly articulates the importance of fostering a positive climate for learning through whole-school approaches to setting high expectations and promoting inclusion. The [Practice Principles](#), within the [Victorian Teaching and Learning Model](#), provides demonstration of how whole-school priorities of inclusion are aligned with specific classroom practices and behaviours.

This Note provides further guidance to support learning through inclusive practices that acknowledge, explore and celebrate the contributions and perspectives of Australian First Nations Peoples.

DEFINING MARRUNG

Marrung (pronounced MA-roong) is the Department of Education and Training's (the Department) Aboriginal Education Plan for 2016-2026. Marrung articulates the importance of all educational settings creating inclusive and respectful environments. The principles of Marrung promote lifelong learning for Koorie Victorians and describe the responsibility of all educators to lead this work. Culturally safe schools respect and honor the long-standing history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as part of our shared national story and identity.

The vision of change contained in Marrung aims to foster greater excellence and equity in educational outcomes for Koorie Victorians and close the gap in educational outcomes between Koorie and non-Koorie Victorians.

To achieve this, we must foster cultural inclusion and build school confidence and capacity to work with communities to implement a shared approach to supporting the health, wellbeing, inclusion, engagement and achievement of all students.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS AND PROMOTING INCLUSION

Student achievement, engagement and wellbeing are supported by a positive learning climate and professional leadership. High expectations, and a supportive and productive learning environment, promote inclusion and collaboration within the classroom and community.

Educational success can be linked to culturally supportive and responsive learning environments from early childhood, through to school and higher education and training. In a school with a positive climate, students are connected and engaged with their learning. Inclusive schools are where all students feel safe and valued, and their diverse backgrounds are respected.

To build the culturally inclusive capital within your school and classroom, a student centered approach to decision making is central to informing the teaching and learning environment. Trust underpins enabling authentic relationships between students, their peers and their teachers. For all students, and particularly Koorie students, it is important to create an environment that is welcoming through displays of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

All students develop a greater understanding of Australia through connections to place and Country when they learn about the history, cultural wealth and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

A starting point can be:

- Developing knowledge of the Country on which the school stands. Share the learnings about the Aboriginal Nation and the history of the Country with the school community.
- Supporting students to learn more about the Country through the curriculum and reinforce the significance of understanding through visible acknowledgement of the Country on plaques and signage within the school.
- Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and have an Acknowledgement of Country at school assemblies and other major school events. These

symbols are an important signal to the school's Koorie community that they belong and are valued.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR EVERY STUDENT

Students enjoy greater success when teaching and learning incorporates students' existing knowledge, and respects and values their identity, language and culture. When we know our students, we have greater opportunity to increase their engagement and learning at their point of need. Positive teacher-student relationships foster strength in learning, and help support a sense of belonging and connectedness with the school.

Active support to foster and sustain high aspirations for all students is critical to engagement and day-to-day learning. Therefore, good teacher-student relationships are correlated with improved teaching and learning outcomes. One of the strongest influences on learning is the home environment where parents, carers, kinship and community are the first educators. Developing relationships with families and carers that allow for reciprocal dialogue about student learning, student goals and engagement can influence student perceptions of being, belonging, connection and learning ability.

For Koorie students, high expectations empower learners to accept challenge and extend themselves. Teacher support to set meaningful and achievable goals is important to build learner self-efficacy and belief which underpin student-led success. (This is particularly important for vulnerable Koorie learners, however it is true for all learners; those who are high achieving and also those at expected levels).

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

All students in Victoria are learning in classrooms on Aboriginal lands. Acknowledgement of the Country on which the school stands is respectful and supports our Nation's journey towards reconciliation.

The knowledge and skills that students develop about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures will enrich all learners' ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia through a deepening understanding and connection with the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESO) can assist schools to review existing inclusive practices through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lens and

identify areas in which the school can develop a more culturally informed practice.

- Teachers and school leaders will be engaging in Cultural Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) with the whole school staff. This provides a great opportunity to invest in further professional learning opportunities to build school capability and confidence with Koorie cultural inclusion.
- As a follow-on from CUST, schools are encouraged to establish a relationship with their local Koorie community. This may be through their KESO, through contacting the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG), the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) or local Aboriginal Corporation.
- In addition, schools may consider developing a bank of quality resources (including digital, hardcopy print resources and artefacts) that support cultural inclusion and work with the local community to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum.

ILLUSTRATION OF PRACTICE

"Relationships are at the heart of learning and central to embedding Koorie cultural inclusion."

Peter Knight, Moolap Primary School Principal

Case study: Moolap Primary School is committed to promoting an inclusive, supportive and secure environment for all members of the community. Koorie cultural inclusion is central to the whole-school vision.

The school undertook CUST in Term 4, 2018. This provided the school with an opportunity to collectively review their existing whole-school approaches to Koorie cultural inclusion and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded within teaching and learning.

"Relationships with a local Aboriginal Elder and our KESO have been instrumental in developing our whole school approach to building cultural awareness across the school".

For the full case study, please see the In Our Classrooms article: [Making cultural inclusion a priority](#)

START A CONVERSATION

The questions below offer conversation starters for group discussions in Professional Learning Communities, Communities of Practice, teaching teams, or individual conversations with learning specialists and other teachers:

- What is the Koorie perspective of history for the land where my school is situated?
- What is the Koorie name for this Country? What is the local Koorie language? Where, or to whom can I go, to find out?
- How many Koorie students attend my school? How are the parents/carers and families supported and empowered to participate in the school community?
- What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural symbols are visible within my classroom, our school, or my community?
- In my learning area, are there meaningful examples of embedded Koorie perspectives within the teaching and learning programs?

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

There is a wide range of valuable resources that you can access to support learning about your school's local area and its Aboriginal nations, languages and traditions.

The strongest connection to Country will be enabled through developing relationships with Koorie families within the school community and building relationships with the local Koorie community through KESOs and the LAECG.

Further resources and professional learning opportunities can be found through:

[Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated \(VAEAI\)](#)

- [Resources for Schools and Families](#)

[Koorie Heritage Trust – Schools and Educators](#)

[Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026](#)

[VIT resources](#)

[Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures](#)

[Aboriginal Languages and Cultures Victoria](#)

For more information or to share your feedback, please email: professional.practice@edumail.vic.gov.au.

KEY TERMS AND ORGANISATIONS

KOORIE

The term Koorie is used inclusively and refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria. The term is a contemporary collective group term and may not be familiar to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As such, it is important to be respectful of how individual students, their families and community refer to themselves, and use this to guide your language when referring to individuals or Community.

The Department and our principle partner in Koorie Education, VAEAI, use this term throughout education documentation. However terms such as Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous and First Nations Peoples are also commonly used in teaching and learning resources.

KOORIE ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT OFFICER (KESO)

KESOs are Area-based professionals, within regions, who are members of the local Aboriginal community with an understanding of Aboriginal culture and the history of their community. KESOs work systematically within multidisciplinary teams to provide advice on the establishment of culturally inclusive learning environments, co-ordination of services to support engagement and improved outcomes for Koorie children and young people.

KESOs play an integral role in working with families, communities, education and service providers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to participate fully in education. KESOs support students and families through transitions across all learning stages where appropriate: in to early years, primary, secondary and further education.

LOCAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUPS (LAECG)

Across Victoria there are 32 LAECGs who are part of VAEAI, the Department's principle partner in Koorie Education. VAEAI is a statewide organisation with a regional structure based on traditional networks. Within each region there are a number of LAECGs with whom you can engage to support the development of teaching and learning to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.