

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools Evaluation Summary



Overview

In 2008, *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools* (EATSIPS) was identified as a key action for the then Department of Education and Training under the *Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan 2009–2012*. The target identified for the initiative was that, by June 2012, the Queensland Government would embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all areas of school practice, in all state schools, to promote a greater understanding of the histories, cultures, values, beliefs, languages, lifestyles and roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Indigenous Schooling Support Unit, Central and Southern Queensland (ISSU, CSQ), Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) is managing the place-based implementation of EATSIPS in Queensland state schools. The *Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools – A guide for school learning communities*, released in March 2011, and a team of EATSIPS Principal Project Officers (PPOs) have been central to the implementation process.

During 2011–12, the Projects Team, Division of Indigenous Education and Training Futures, DETE, conducted an evaluation of the implementation of EATSIPS in Queensland state schools to inform ongoing service delivery.

The core questions for the evaluation were:

1. How has EATSIPS been rolled out to schools and school communities during 2010–11?
2. At the end of 2011, to what extent do schools perceive they have progressed with implementing EATSIPS?
3. To what extent are school communities working to raise community awareness of the EATSIPS implementation?
4. What has enabled and limited schools in implementing EATSIPS?
5. What key things would assist schools as they continue to implement EATSIPS in the future?

A multi-method approach was used with data sources including: a telephone survey with Education Queensland (EQ) regional senior officers; discussions with the EATSIPS PPOs; a web survey of school staff working with EATSIPS PPOs; discussion groups with school staff, parents and community members; and data from the *Implementation of EATSIPS Survey October 2011*.

The evaluation key findings for each core question are outlined below, followed by the conclusions.

Cover photo: Elder Uncle Frank Malone reading with Prep students at Cherbourg State School (Photo by Harrison Saragossi, Copyright State of Queensland).

Back cover photo: Murgon State School Waka Waka Dance Group.

Key findings

How has EATSIPS been rolled out to schools and school communities?

1. EATSIPS PPOs have been central to the roll-out of EATSIPS in six of the seven EQ regions during 2010–11, delivering cluster-based professional development using a common suite of materials, conducting follow-up visits with individual schools, and instigating additional local activities. An officer was appointed to support the seventh EQ region in 2012.
2. A strength of the EATSIPS service delivery model during 2010 and 2011 was the combination of cluster- and school-based professional development, which provided EATSIPS officers with the flexibility to work with school staff to develop place-based strategies within the context of a consistent professional development framework. However, this flexibility also resulted in variation within and across regions in terms of scheduling of professional development, mode of school support, frequency of school visits, and the nature and extent of EATSIPS PPO involvement in additional place-based activities.
3. The support provided by the EATSIPS PPOs and the quality of the professional development materials and resources were highly regarded by senior EQ officers, school principals and staff, parents of Indigenous¹ students and Indigenous community members. However, some concerns were raised about staffing, particularly in relation to the adequacy of the staffing model in regions where EATSIPS PPOs supported schools across vast and diverse geographical areas, and the need for ongoing communication with EQ regional senior staff about the scope of the EATSIPS PPO role, responsibilities and reporting processes.

To what extent do schools perceive they have progressed with implementing EATSIPS?

4. Queensland state schools have responded positively to the roll-out of EATSIPS since it commenced in 2009. The large majority of schools surveyed in October 2011 reported that they had either commenced, or planned to commence, implementation by the end of 2011. Some of the schools that had not commenced by the end of 2011 may require additional support in 2012, as they indicated they needed assistance or information to progress further.

¹ The term 'Indigenous' is used throughout this document to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia

5. Overall, school progress with the implementation appears mixed. On a positive note, in each of the four action areas, over half of the surveyed schools (57.3% to 66.8%) reported in October 2011 that they had reached the 'engaged' phase or further on the EATSIPS implementation continuum. However, the remaining schools were either in the 'uninformed' phase or still only in the 'awareness' phase.
6. Discussions with school staff and Indigenous community members during the site visits confirmed that some schools are well progressed along the EATSIPS implementation continuum, and are implementing a range of strategies that are making a positive contribution to improving outcomes for Indigenous students and increasing staff cultural awareness. A common feature in these schools is a strong and inclusive performance agenda aimed at improving outcomes for all students, while valuing cultural diversity. These schools are also implementing specific learning support strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
7. In some regions, EATSIPS cluster school meetings and EATSIPS celebration days have provided effective opportunities for schools that are well progressed to share their achievements and mentor staff from other schools.
8. While staff survey data indicated that staff confidence in their ability to implement EATSIPS was high, one of the common themes to emerge across all of the evaluation data sources was the need to continue to focus on developing cultural confidence and competence of non-Indigenous staff.
9. In schools that have progressed well along the EATSIPS implementation continuum², staff and Indigenous community members appear confident that there are clear benefits for Indigenous students and their families and teachers. Participants in the site visit discussions noted that EATSIPS had contributed to increased levels of staff cultural awareness and competence, and increased levels of cultural identity and pride. They also reported improved academic outcomes for Indigenous students, and stronger partnerships between the school and parents of Indigenous students and local Indigenous community members.

To what extent are school communities working to raise community awareness of the EATSIPS implementation?

10. While the majority of schools responding to the school survey perceived that their local community was aware of EATSIPS, the extent of reported awareness varied, and was at times quite low. Most schools had not made contact with local Elders, nor established a community reference or parent group.
11. Those parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous community members who participated in the site visit discussion groups indicated they were aware of, and appreciated, the activities that had been implemented in their local school/s to improve outcomes for Indigenous students, engage parents of Indigenous students, and increase the cultural awareness and understanding of staff and non-Indigenous students. They stressed the need to ensure that the EATSIPS implementation continues to be prioritised and resourced appropriately to ensure sustainability.
12. A key message from parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous community members about how to promote parental and community engagement in school activities was the importance of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in schools in paid positions to provide students and families with a trusted point of contact in the school, and to help raise staff and student awareness of local Indigenous cultures. Participants also stressed the need for schools to provide culturally safe spaces for Indigenous students and parents, and opportunities for parents and community members to be involved in significant cultural events — for example, celebration days and National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) events.

What has enabled and limited schools in implementing EATSIPS?

13. It was clear from all evaluation data sources that the following key factors had helped schools implement EATSIPS during 2010 and 2011: the leadership and commitment of the EATSIPS PPOs; the EATSIPS professional development materials and resources; and strong partnerships with Indigenous parents and community members. The contribution of Indigenous support staff in schools, and their role in connecting schools with local Indigenous communities, was acknowledged. Active engagement by regional and school leaders, and whole-of-school ownership, also emerged as essential enablers.

² An EATSIPS implementation continuum is identified in *EATSIPS – A guide for school learning communities* as a tool for schools to monitor their implementation progress. There are five phases on the continuum: Phase 1 – uninformed; Phase 2 – aware; Phase 3 – engaged; Phase 4 – mobilised; Phase 5 – actioning and implementing

14. Effective community engagement continues to be an ongoing challenge in some locations. The most common theme to emerge from discussions with school staff about the constraints to the EATSIPS implementation was the challenge of finding ways to continue to strengthen partnerships with local Indigenous communities, and to actively involve Indigenous community members in school activities.
15. Other identified challenges, which could be addressed by clear and ongoing communication to schools about expectations in relation to the EATSIPS implementation, included overcoming misconceptions that the initiative is only for schools with Indigenous student enrolments, addressing uncertainty about the mandatory nature of the initiative, and prioritising EATSIPS given the number of competing educational agendas.
16. The destabilising effects of high turnover of school leaders, particularly in rural and remote locations, and limited availability of resources to support implementation of specific EATSIPS strategies, were also identified as challenges.

What key things would assist schools as they continue to implement EATSIPS in the future?

17. The evaluation data indicates that the following key things would assist schools to progress EATSIPS in the future:
 - clear messages about the value of EATSIPS, and implementation expectations from EQ at state and regional levels
 - ongoing leadership and support for the EATSIPS implementation by EQ senior regional managers and school principals
 - strategic and collaborative effort to align EATSIPS with other programs and initiatives
 - ongoing access for schools to EATSIPS professional development, materials and resources
 - opportunities to share EATSIPS success stories
 - continued focus on assisting schools with:
 - understanding ways to develop and maintain partnerships with local Indigenous communities, particularly in schools where there are no or low Indigenous enrolments, or where past histories have been challenging
 - embedding EATSIPS in the curriculum, and understanding what this means in the context of *Curriculum to Classroom*
 - building whole-of-school capacity so that EATSIPS is integral to sustainable school practices
 - continued support for the employment of Indigenous workers in schools.

Conclusions

The findings of the evaluation indicate that the intent of EATSIPS has been well received by senior EQ officers, school principals and staff, parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous community members.

Overall, the roll-out of EATSIPS has been well supported during 2010 and 2011, despite a gap in service delivery in one EQ region. In particular, the evaluation data shows that the work of the EATSIPS PPOs and the quality of the EATSIPS professional development materials and resources are highly regarded, and have made a positive contribution to the successful roll-out of the program.

The response of Queensland state schools to EATSIPS has been positive, and the majority have commenced implementation. However, it is clear that progress with the EATSIPS implementation varies across schools.

Many schools have progressed well along the EATSIPS continuum, and are implementing a range of strategies that are making a positive contribution to improving outcomes for Indigenous students, and increasing staff cultural awareness and competence. It is important that the momentum is maintained in these schools, and that they are provided with opportunities to share their experiences and strategies with other schools.

The schools that have been slow to commence implementation, or have yet to move from the 'awareness' phase to the 'actioning' phase, require further assistance to prioritise EATSIPS and to continue to progress along the EATSIPS implementation continuum.

A key message from the evaluation is that continued communication with schools about the intent of EATSIPS, and implementation expectations, is critical to the ongoing implementation of EATSIPS. The alignment of EATSIPS with other programs and initiatives is also needed so that EATSIPS can be sustained and become integral to state, regional and school programs.

