

ACARA's submission to the Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

June 2026

As the national authority for curriculum, assessment and reporting, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is committed to supporting the learning of all young Australians by delivering a world-class curriculum that equips students with the knowledge, skills and intercultural understanding needed to thrive.

ACARA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

This submission is specifically responding to the inquiry's third term of reference: "*Initiatives that are effective in combating racism targeted at First Nations people and reduce individual and collective harm.*"

Education is a key mechanism for addressing racism. The Australian Curriculum provides a structured, and sustained approach across the years of schooling to build knowledge and understanding, challenge prejudice, and foster respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is also a nationally coordinated, evidence-informed initiative that plays a critical role in addressing racism through education.

This submission focuses on:

1. The purpose, vision, and scope of the Australian Curriculum
2. Learning area content
3. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority (CCP)
4. The FIRST framework.

Purpose and vision of the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum is first and foremost an explicit statement of the priorities and aspirations we hold for our young people. It reflects what the Australian community values as the knowledge, understanding and skills students should develop at school.

It exemplifies a shared commitment to high expectations for all learners, and to respectful and rational discussion of different perspectives, values and beliefs, and to democratic processes that support the common good.

The Australian Curriculum supports every student to build strong foundations in literacy and numeracy skills in the early years. It then enables them to develop deep knowledge in the learning areas, alongside the capabilities needed to navigate rapid social and technological change.

Through this, it prepares young people to contribute to Australia as a prosperous, compassionate, and just society. Achieving these aspirations is influenced by how the curriculum is enacted in classrooms, schools and education systems. Educator capability, culturally responsive practice, leadership commitment and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are important factors in ensuring curriculum intent is translated into positive learning outcomes.

First Nations advice

The Australian Curriculum was developed and reviewed in consultation with ACARA's First Nations Australian Advisory Group (FNAAG), comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, academics, community representatives and cultural experts. The advice of FNAAG informed the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority and supported the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, histories, and cultures throughout the curriculum.

Scope of the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum is structured around 3 interrelated dimensions: discipline-based learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities. This 3-dimensional design reflects the intentions of both the [Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians \(2008\)](#) and the [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration \(2019\)](#).

It supports students to develop deep knowledge within the learning areas alongside the skills, behaviours and dispositions needed to navigate a complex and changing world.

The cross-curriculum priorities — **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures**; **Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia**; and **Sustainability** — enrich learning by making it more relevant, contemporary and engaging.

The Australian Curriculum plays an important role in actively countering racism and promoting equity. Racism causes both individual and collective harm. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this can include diminished wellbeing, exclusion, unsafe learning environments, lower expectations, disengagement from education and the ongoing impacts of deficit narratives and misinformation. Racism is maintained through misinformation, historical omissions and deficit narratives. Effective approaches must:

- empower students to critically understand how systemic racism, bias and other forms of racism exist in society
- commit to truth-telling about Australia's history, including colonisation, dispossession and the enduring resilience of First Nations peoples
- cultivate racial equity and cultural safety by teaching diverse worldviews, intercultural understanding and respect for First Nations people, their cultures and their Country
- challenge and address racial stereotypes, unconscious bias and discriminatory practices in schools.

The Australian Curriculum addresses these aspects through a whole-of-system approach across Foundation to Year 10. This ensures anti-racism education is embedded as a core national expectation, rather than being optional or fragmented.

As part of all learning areas in the Australian Curriculum, ACARA provides key considerations on protocols for engaging First Nations Australians.

When planning teaching and learning activities that involve engagement with First Nations Australians, teachers should follow protocols that describe principles, procedures and behaviours. The protocols support the recognition of and respect for First Nations Australians and their intellectual property.

Teachers should draw on approved resources, including those provided by state and territory education authorities, First Nations Australian education consultative groups, or other sources endorsed by First Nations Australians.

While the Australian Curriculum uses the terms “First Nations Australians” and “Australian First Nations people”, it is important to recognise that different communities may prefer different terms. Teachers should use the terminology preferred by First Nations Australians in their local area.

The Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences

[Humanities and Social Sciences \(HASS\)](#) is the main learning area in which students explore and deepen their knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander people as the world's oldest continuous living cultures and First Nations People of Australia.

Students understand the enduring impacts of colonisation on Australian First Nations Peoples' cultures and the impact of the doctrine of *terra nullius* on ownership of and access to Country/Place. Importantly, this learning area includes the significant contributions of Australian First Nations Peoples' histories and cultures on a local, national, regional and global scale.

Students appreciate and celebrate the diversity of Australian First Nations Peoples' cultures. They understand how these cultures are based on special connections to Country/Place, and have unique belief systems and ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing linked to these physical and spiritual interconnections. The development of these understandings includes exploring contemporary issues that demonstrate the dynamic nature of Australian First Nations Peoples' cultures.

This learning area develops students' knowledge of citizenship that positions First Nations Australians as the Traditional Owners of Country/Place and highlights how native title law recognises Australian First Nations Peoples' rights and interests. Students examine the sophisticated social organisation systems, protocols, kinship structures, economies and enterprises of First Nations Australians.

In this learning area, students use primary and secondary sources, including oral histories and traditional, culturally appropriate sources to see events through multiple perspectives. This supports them to empathise and to consider ethically the investigation, preservation and conservation of sites of significance to First Nations Australians.

The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

[Health and Physical Education](#) enables students to develop skills, understanding, and willingness to positively influence the health and wellbeing of themselves and their communities. In this learning area, students develop an understanding of how to challenge discrimination, assumptions, and stereotypes. They gain skills to take positive action regarding diversity, inclusion, consent, and respect in different social contexts.

Within the strand of Personal, social and community health, this learning area aims to enable students to:

- access, evaluate and synthesise information to make informed choices and act to enhance and advocate for their own and others' health, wellbeing, safety and physical activity participation
- develop and use personal, social and cognitive skills and strategies to promote self-identity and wellbeing, and to build and manage respectful relationships
- analyse how varied and changing personal and contextual factors shape opportunities for health and physical activity.

In Health and Physical Education, students can explore the role identity and connection play in the health and wellbeing of First Nations Australians. Students have opportunities to investigate the lived experiences of First Nations Australians and their impact on identities, connection to Country/Place, and the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Students gain insights into the impact systemic racism and discrimination have had on Australian First Nations Peoples. They can investigate strategies that promote truth-telling and build cultural awareness to develop empathy and respectful relationships.

Intercultural understanding – General capability

Intercultural understanding encompasses the behaviours and dispositions that students need to understand what happens and what to do when cultures intersect.

Through learning to value their own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others, young people are supported to become responsible local and global citizens. They are equipped for living and working in an interconnected world.

Intercultural understanding involves students developing the knowledge and skills needed to reflect on culture and cultural diversity, engage with cultural and linguistic diversity, and navigate intercultural contexts.

The [Intercultural Understanding learning continuum](#) is organised into 3 elements:

- *Reflecting on culture and cultural diversity:* Students develop intercultural understanding by reflecting on culture and cultural diversity, including exploring the relationship between culture and identity, examining how cultural perspectives and worldviews are shaped over time, and considering how cultures influence interactions with others.
- *Engaging with cultural and linguistic diversity:* Students develop intercultural understanding by engaging with cultural and linguistic diversity through responsive communication, perspective-taking and empathy, enabling them to interact respectfully, consider multiple viewpoints, and work towards inclusive and equitable outcomes.
- *Navigating intercultural contexts:* Students develop intercultural understanding by navigating intercultural contexts, including reflecting on responses to intercultural experiences, recognising and challenging biases, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and adapting their interactions to engage respectfully and constructively with others.

Developing intercultural understanding supports students to move beyond awareness of cultural diversity towards recognising and challenging stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and systemic racism. It encourages students to reflect critically on assumptions, consider multiple perspectives and contribute to more inclusive and equitable communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures - Cross-curriculum priority

[The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority](#) is not a separate learning area or subject. Rather, it provides opportunities to enrich the content of the learning areas, where appropriate, allowing students to engage with and better understand their world.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is a key dimension in the Australian Curriculum aligned to the third aspect of the Terms of Reference. It is embedded, where relevant, across all learning areas, including Humanities and Social Sciences, Languages, The Arts, English, Science,

Health and Physical Education, and Technologies. Using respectful and culturally responsive language is an essential component of reconciliation and strengthening relationships between Australian First Nations Peoples and the wider Australian community.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-curriculum priority articulates and supports the acquisition of deeper knowledge and understanding through the 3 interconnected organising ideas of Country/Place, Culture and People:

- *Country/Place*: Recognises the special connection to Country/Place and celebrates the unique belief systems that connect Australian First Nations Peoples physically and spiritually to Country/Place. It positions First Nations Australians as the Traditional Owners of Country/Place and highlights how native title law recognises the rights and interests of both the First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait in Country/Place.
- *Culture*: This examines the cultural diversity of the First Peoples of Australia and the First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait, including their unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. It recognises Australia's First Peoples as belonging to the world's oldest continuous cultures and acknowledges the many historic and enduring impacts on the cultures of First Nations Australians. It also clarifies that the cultures of First Nations Australians are not static and have internationally enshrined special rights that ensure they can be maintained, controlled, protected and developed.
- *People*: This acknowledges the occupation of the Australian continent by the First Peoples of Australia for more than 60,000 years and highlights that Australia has 2 distinct First Nations Peoples, each encompassing a diversity of nations and peoples. It also examines the sophisticated social organisation systems, protocols, kinship structures and the significant contributions of First Nations Australians' histories and cultures on a local, national and global scale.

Through these learning opportunities, students develop a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, knowledges and contributions. This supports the development of respect, reconciliation, cultural recognition, positive identity formation and a greater appreciation of the diversity and strengths of First Nations communities.

This learning is found in Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and is strengthened across other learning areas, (e.g. The Arts), where students engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, knowledges and perspectives in different contexts.

Support resource – The FIRST framework

In addition to curriculum content, ACARA has developed the [FIRST framework](#) to support teachers to implement this learning in culturally responsive and respectful ways. The framework assists teachers to build their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, engage with local First Nations communities, reflect on their own knowledge and practice, and establish respectful relationships that support authentic learning experiences. The framework also supports educators to engage in critical reflection, strengthen cultural capability, build culturally safe learning environments and develop the confidence to address racism, stereotypes and misinformation when they arise in classroom contexts.

Together, the curriculum content and the FIRST framework provide practical support for teachers to address racism, stereotypes, prejudice and misinformation in the classroom. By strengthening teachers' cultural capability and confidence, supporting truth-telling, and promoting engagement with diverse perspectives and lived experiences, these resources help create learning environments that foster respect, challenge deficit narratives and contribute to reducing racism directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The First framework is a guide to assist teachers and schools to engage with their local First Nations communities to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. It guides teachers to consider what is in the curriculum and how they could work with local First Nations Australians to develop and deliver a culturally effective teaching and learning program.

The FIRST framework is structured as:

- **F = Find out about:** What is in the curriculum? What is your current competency and practice? What is your relationship with First Nations People in your local area? What has worked before?
- **I = Indigenous knowledges and voices:** How can you engage with local or other First Nations People to listen to their knowledges and voices?
- **R = Respectful relationships:** How can you develop respectful, reciprocal partnerships to produce and deliver high-quality teaching and learning plans?
- **S = Supporting student learning:** How can you engage students and develop activities to gather evidence of learning and give feedback to progress learning?
- **T = Time:** How can you ensure adequate time is allocated to develop effective partnerships with First Nations People?

Conclusion

In addressing racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, education remains an effective mechanism to support change. The Australian Curriculum provides relevant curriculum content and an evidence-informed resource framework that supports truth-telling, challenges misinformation and deficit narratives, and fosters understanding, respect and intercultural capability for young Australians. Through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority, supported by resources such as the FIRST framework, the curriculum embeds opportunities for all students to engage with the histories, cultures, knowledges and contributions of First Nations Australians in respectful and meaningful ways.

While the Australian Curriculum provides a strong national foundation, curriculum content alone does not guarantee anti-racist practice or reduced harm. Effective implementation depends on educator capability, culturally safe learning environments, leadership commitment, meaningful participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, access to high-quality resources and sustained support across education systems. The curriculum should therefore be understood as one part of a broader anti-racism ecosystem.

Combating racism requires sustained, systemic action that addresses underlying causes, as well as its harmful impacts. By ensuring accurate representation, strengthening respectful relationships with First Nations communities, and equipping educators to deliver culturally responsive teaching and learning, the Australian Curriculum contributes to a preventative, nation-building response to racism. ACARA remains committed to working with the First Nations Australian Advisory Group, Elders, Knowledge custodians, education systems, schools and communities to ensure the Australian Curriculum continues to support a more informed, respectful and just Australia for all. Sustained progress requires shared responsibility across governments, education authorities, schools, communities and curriculum bodies.