

First Nations K-12 Strategic Plan

2025-2034



Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand, and one of the 29 clans of the Eora Nation, which is bordered by the Hawkesbury River to the north, the Nepean River to the west and the Georges River to the south.

We would also like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



About the artwork

This artwork was created by Charmaine and Jason Mumbulla, parents of two Secondary students who attended Gawura School, and are now in St Andrew's Cathedral School.

The sunrise announces the dawn of a new day and represents the bright hope we have for First Nations students at the Schools. The eucalyptus tree at the centre of the artwork depicts a child, deeply rooted in faith and culture, standing tall and strong. The tree's roots extend out and are fed by both the rich, fertile soil of Country and 'living water'. The vibrant blue circles under the tree represent family, friends, Elders, teachers, mentors, coaches and school leaders who sustain the child on their journey, while the brown-hued connected circles above the tree celebrate important milestones on the child's learning journey.

Australia's First Nations peoples have used the eucalyptus tree, in particular its leaves, for its medicinal properties since time immemorial. Revelation 22 describes a special tree with leaves 'for the healing of the nations', symbolising a renewed future where different peoples are brought together in peace and restoration. A tree bears fruit and nectar in season, which can be seen as both the practices that strengthen a child in culture, as well as the behaviour or character of a person whose faith is seen in their actions.

Both saltwater (oceans) and freshwater (rivers) are depicted in this artwork – two distinct ecosystems. In the Bible, Psalm 1 compares a person 'fed' by God's word as being like a tree with roots 'fed' by streams of water. Jesus speaks of 'living water' in John 4:13, 'Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

The artwork also shows a whale pod frolicking in the ocean. Gawura means whale in the local Gadigal language. Whales were and are very significant to Gadigal people, as they represent wisdom and longevity, a strong, wise community that equips a child to 'swim' their own course into the world beyond school. The whales swim past shell middens, reminding us of First Nations peoples continuing connection to Country over millennia.

Crowning the sunrise, the Bogong moths represent the journey each child will take. While each journey is different, it is our hope that each student will find their voice and individual strengths and passions, knowing they belong, are loved by God and gifted for a purposeful future. The bird that finds its home in the tree is a Whistling Kite, indigenous to the lands of the Gundungurra people, where Kirrikee, our outdoor education centre is located. Providing a home for the kite reveals that the child grows strong, resilient and sure enough to provide refuge and strength to others.

The artwork is a result of a number of conversations – most importantly with students as they engaged with First Nations consultancy Two Point Co. describing their experiences at the Schools through Narrative Art Therapy, parents in a Yarning Circle conversation generously hosted by South's Cares and with staff of Gawura School and St Andrew's Cathedral School.



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Cultural Acknowledgement & Cultural Content and Intellectual Property

St Andrew's Cathedral School would respectfully like to acknowledge that we have engaged with First Nations Families from Gawura School and the wider Community in Sydney. We appreciate and recognise them and their individual Nations and Traditional Homelands across Australia.

Throughout this dialogue we appreciated their insight, Cultural expertise and thought-provoking conversations.

Accepting that this process is ancient and deeply embedded in 'truth telling'. We uphold their contributions as part of their Cultural protocols, and wisdom; that has been passed down from generation to generation since 'time immemorial'.

We value and note their individual Cultural and Intellectual Knowledge as the property of their individual Nations, Country and Lands; and wholeheartedly honour and agree to uphold these Cultural expectations in the 'spirit of truth telling'.

All Cultural and Intellectual Data shared is collective knowledge across Countries and has been used genetically to contribute to the end result for the betterment of all Australians. 'It is our Cultural duty to ensure Cultural processes and Cultural Authenticity is upheld for all and future generations to come', Leanna Carr 2025.



Message from the Chair

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Matthew 17:20

It is my pleasure to present our First Nations K-12 Strategic Plan, on behalf of the School Council. The Plan is the result of significant and important stakeholder engagement and outlines the future direction of our unique First Nations model of education, K-12. I want to thank members of the Gawura Strategic Plan Working Group, the Gawura Parents' Advisory Committee (GPAC) and those who have invested such energy into bringing this into fruition, including Dr Bob McDonald, Strategy Consultant, and Ms Jackie Isenegger. I also want to acknowledge the wise, invaluable counsel of Aunty Leanna Carr-Smith in her role as Elder in Residence, and Pastor Ray and Aunty Sharon Minniecon, whose commitment to First Nations education has been substantial and ongoing since the inception of Gawura School in 2007.

While the First Nations K-12 Strategic Plan considers a number of Strategic Initiatives that involve the whole of St Andrew's Cathedral School and Gawura School, more importantly, the Plan reflects who we are becoming. First Nations communities are having a transformational impact on our whole school and the Strategic Plan acknowledges that embedding First Nations Knowledge into a rich, culturally informed curriculum creates significant learning opportunities for all students. This Knowledge, from the world's oldest continuous living culture, has survived for over 60,000 years ... remarkable, considering the immense losses and inequalities experienced by First Nations peoples over the past 250 years. As a Christian school, committed to justice, it is important to acknowledge this.

Yet as our society struggles with the effects of an isolating individualism, these deep and complex First Nations Knowledge systems, just like the Christian story that our Schools are founded on, have much to say about human sustainment, our approach to technology, our relationship to the earth, our idea of the social world, as well as the importance of place, belonging and connectedness. What a rich heritage our students are offered, as we build bridges between culture and faith. I am excited about what the future holds.

Mr Michael Winram

Chair of St Andrew's Cathedral School Council and Gawura School Council



Enduring Purpose

*Bridging Worlds,
Building Futures:
Authentically engaging
with Christian faith and
First Nations heritage,
we bridge ancient wisdom
with contemporary
learning, educating
students to lead a
resilient future.*



Vision

*Empowering
confident, hope-filled
champions of a just
tomorrow.*



Message from the Founders of Gawura School

The artwork featured in this Strategic Plan shows a tree, growing and flourishing, embedded in faith and culture. In the Bible, trees are powerful symbols of life, strength, and connection. From the Tree of Life in Genesis to the Tree of Healing in Revelation, trees often represent growth, wisdom, and resilience. Psalm 1 compares a righteous person to "a tree planted by streams of water," with deep roots, nourishment, and a supportive environment in which to thrive.

For First Nations students, this symbolism resonates profoundly. Like trees, students require strong roots—cultural identity, family, and community—along with the nourishment of Knowledge, a warm sense of belonging, and guidance, to flourish. Student success depends on a recognition of their unique strengths and aspirations: seen for who they are and grounded in their strong heritage, they can reach toward a promising future.

Given the critical importance of hearing from First Nations individuals and communities in the decisions that affect them, I want to acknowledge the work of First Nations consultancy Two Point Co. as well as Dr Bob McDonald, Strategy Consultant, for their foundational work on the Insights and Aspirations Reports. I also want to thank the community for their input, in particular Charmaine and Jason Mumbulla for an artwork which reflects the hopes and dreams of our people for their children.

The Strategic Themes that emerged, over the course of much yarning, were 'Bridging Worlds' and 'Building Futures'. In 'Bridging Worlds', we want our students to come to school and feel they can fully show up. We encourage a strong sense of belonging by solidifying connections to Country, the influence of cultural mentors, Elders and role models; along with the support of an involved community. 'Bridging Worlds' also means embracing a vital part of what it is to be human—our spiritual side.

'Building Futures' reflects our determination that our students will leave our Schools prepared for tomorrow, with the faith, cultural connections, knowledge, skills and expertise to pursue lives of significance and purpose. The Strategic Themes reflect our hope that all students, regardless of cultural background, and our community more broadly, can benefit from First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing: stories of belonging, stories that teach us how to care for, nurture, protect and support each other and the land on which we all so depend.

Pastor Ray and Aunty Sharon Minniecon
Founders of Gawura School

Message from the Head of School

Bridging Worlds

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

It has been humbling and exciting to hear the rich conversations about 'Bridging Worlds' and 'Building Futures' that have taken place across our School community, resulting in our First Nations K-12 Strategic Plan 2025-2034.

'Bridging Worlds' is not easy. However, our Schools are founded on the ultimate story of 'Bridging Worlds': Jesus Christ, the Word becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us, 'Bridging Worlds' through both grace and truth.

It is through grace and truth that we too can 'Bridge Worlds'; building trust, listening deeply to each other, weaving our cultural stories together in the pursuit of developing, 'confident, hope-filled champions of a just tomorrow'. In that way, the lives of all of our students will tell a new story.

Every culture deploys 'stories' to live by. So often these are reductionist 'stories': there is nothing beyond the 'here and now'; we are individuals who need to assert our own self-interest; we are consumers, rather than stewards of the earth that sustains us. Yet, the ancient wisdom that comes from First Nations peoples is far from this reductionism. Rather it tells a rich and expansive story of connection to land and peoples. We have much to learn from that richness and I am excited about the opportunity we have to take this essential journey together.

Dr Julie McGonigle

Head of St Andrew's Cathedral School
and Gawura School



Planning Principles

The following planning principles were applied in the development of this Strategic Plan:

Listening for understanding and valuing all voices

Widespread culturally informed consultations were conducted across both Gawura School and St Andrew's Cathedral School. First Nations students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, Aunties, community members, executive staff and Founders were consulted in a variety of ways to ensure both access and equitable input. Two Point Co., a First Nations consultancy, conducted: trauma informed art therapy workshops with students; surveys; focus groups; and one-on-one interviews with all other First Nations stakeholders, in-person at School and in Redfern, online and by phone. Dr Bob McDonald, Strategy Consultant, also used the same methodology with non-Indigenous staff, parents, School Council and Foundation members, Old Andreans, donors and executive staff, and worked together with Two Point Co. to produce a final Aspirations Report, which was a critical input to this Strategic Plan.

Inclusive, strengths-based approach

The 'Gawura Strategic Plan Working Group' (as it was originally constituted before the Vision was developed) brought together First Nations and non-Indigenous stakeholders from across both Schools, to listen with open hearts and minds, and provide valuable insights from their lived experience. All attending members heard the same information, debated, challenged and wrestled with sometimes divergent views and data. The principle of 'nothing about us without us' was applied diligently to all workshops and discussions, and a concerted effort was made to approach all inputs and discussions from a strengths-based perspective. The Strategic Plan is richer and better informed due to the consensus that came from these interactions.

Evidence-informed continuous improvement

Data, evidence and truth telling were all applied in equal measure in the input presentations and facilitated discussions. This transparency has contributed to the level of trust and ownership felt by stakeholders as we publish this Plan. Critical reflective practice was employed as the team processed information and returned to stakeholders for feedback, building a significant platform for ongoing, meaningful engagement and consultation with First Nations stakeholders across both Schools. Heartfelt thanks go to Dr Bob McDonald for his calm, wise counsel, and Christ-like approach in all matters; and to Pastor Ray and Aunty Sharon Minniecon – who humbly shepherded this Plan through to completion – for your perseverance, wisdom and leadership of your people – we deeply thank you.

Individual and collective accountability for results

We have used the Balanced Scorecard methodology as it facilitates the successful implementation of a strategy, using critical components - a 'strategy on a page' via a Strategy Map (pages 14-15); a balanced set of measures and targets; annual operational planning which promotes rolling Strategic Initiatives for implementation; and strategy reviews and regular reporting on progress.

The exciting task of implementation is only just beginning. We sincerely hope that all parts of our community join us in making First Nations education everybody's business!

Strategic Themes

Bridging Worlds

Gawura School and St Andrew's Cathedral School are committed to growing hope-filled First Nations young people who can capably and confidently walk in different worlds.

Our students are guided by the wisdom of dedicated, expert teachers; cultural mentors; and Elders, who are deeply committed to the success of our distinctive 'high expectations relationships approach' to First Nations education. We combine Biblical understanding with character development, student leadership opportunities, extensive co-curricular activities and critical connections to Country. This approach results in high levels of engagement, retention and academic achievement, with our students developing a strong sense of personal responsibility, voice, agency and belonging.

We sustain strong connections to community and our rich, culturally informed curriculum and pedagogy build important foundational skills in literacy and numeracy so that the whole curriculum can be accessed at every stage.

First Nations cultures have had a transformative impact on our unique whole school identity, and graduates, staff and parents, regardless of cultural heritage, emerge with a deep commitment to restoration and healing.



Building Futures

Situated on unceded Gadigal land, our Schools have a unique approach to First Nations education: our faith in Jesus Christ, His mission and His work motivates us to seek unity and create a gracious space where we meet each other in difference, finding transformation and healing through everyday encounters.

To bridge the gap born out of First Nations adversity and disadvantage, we fundraise for ongoing, sustainable resources, including support services, infrastructure and fit for purpose spaces that build on cultural strengths.

In partnership with parents, our highly relational teachers, mentors and Elders are invested in students accessing First Nations Knowledge, embracing their proud history and culture, and understanding the fullness of who they are.

Embracing their God-given gifts and cultural assets, students find their voice and individual strengths and passions, creating pathways for further education and employment. Our students are equipped with the necessary credentials to pursue lives of purpose and influence, with the confidence, capability and character to champion a just tomorrow.

Strategy Map

Vision:

Empowering confident, hope-filled champions of a just tomorrow.

Our Students and Community



Our Financial Stewardship



Our Practices



Our People, Culture and Resources



Enduring Purpose:

*Bridging Worlds, Building Futures:
Authentically engaging with Christian faith and First Nations heritage, we bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary learning, educating students to lead a resilient future.*



Our People, Culture and Resources

Attract, develop and retain high quality, culturally capable staff

Result Statement

We recruit, develop and retain highly engaged, expert staff with a shared Christian faith and purpose who are passionate about the relational nature of teaching, developing their practice, and student achievement. They understand First Nations cultures and the unique challenges First Nations children and families experience, and work closely with Elders and mentors in a community based on trust and high expectations.

We retain our valued staff with a thriving, culturally responsive school-wide culture of mutual trust and collaboration. Staff feel supported and equipped for our well-resourced professional development, coaching and mentoring.

Measures:

- Staff Engagement and Wellbeing
- School Progress
- TSAS Internship Intake

Empower
Christian
understanding,
cultural capability
and leadership

Result Statement

Motivated by Christ's love and His work of restoration and practical reconciliation, our Schools lead in co-designing a unique approach to a holistic First Nations education that bridges faith, culture, place and social group, reflecting an authentic Christianity that is engaging, relational and integrated throughout school life.

Our School leadership drives a genuine engagement with First Nation Elders, parents and communities: both Schools benefit from First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, and culturally informed governance practices are adopted.

- Measures:
 - Biblical Understanding
 - Cultural Responsiveness
 - Culturally Competent Staff
 - Cultural Allyship

Develop culturally informed, fit for purpose spaces & support infrastructure

Result Statement:

We commit significant resources to creating support services and culturally informed, fit for purpose spaces and infrastructure that promote the safety, wellbeing and belonging of First Nations students, so they are able to fully participate in school life. These spaces encourage parents to be actively involved in their children's education.

Measures:

Our Practice



Result Statement:

Our teachers know how to prepare our students for the opportunities and challenges that come with 'Bridging Worlds'. Rapid student progress and attainment is driven by our 'high expectations relationships mindset', with rich and challenging curriculum, and pedagogy that systematically builds strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy and is enhanced by First Nations Knowledge and ways of being.

Measures:

Academic Progress
NAPLAN Literacy and Numeracy

Result Statement:

We integrate Biblical understanding with character development, an ethic of service, student leadership opportunities and high expectations, so students develop a strong sense of personal responsibility, voice, agency and belonging. Wellbeing is supported by Elders, mentors and community working alongside staff and students. Our extensive co-curricular programme, including sport, performing arts, on-Country Tours, and a challenging outdoor education programme, ensures students discover their gifts and talents.

Measures:

Student Attendance
Student Flourishing
Student Retention

Result Statement:

Through a consistent, trauma-informed and child-centred approach, staff across both schools establish high-trust relationships with First Nations students, their parents and the community. This collaborative and inclusive environment supports the holistic development, wellbeing and retention of students who are enabled to celebrate their proud history and culture, because First Nations culture is embraced in classrooms and through enduring relationships with generations of alumni.

Measures:

Parent Satisfaction and Engagement

Result Statement:

Robust monitoring and evaluation processes, transparent reporting and collaborative dialogue builds a culture of ongoing reflection and growth, improving organisational processes and outcome reporting, and ensuring the Schools and our governance structures remain responsive to the needs of students, staff, the community and accountable to donors.

Measures:

Donor Satisfaction
Enrolment Mix





Our Financial Stewardship

Develop sustainable revenue

Result Statement:

Sustainable revenue streams are established through diversified funding sources and well managed strategic and donor relationships, ensuring long-term financial stability and secure investment in the School's ongoing growth and development.

Measures:

Fundraising Revenue
Diversified Income Streams

Optimise resource allocation and use

Result Statement:

We intentionally manage the resources entrusted to us wisely, mindful of the best interests of our students, community, and the social and environmental impact of our activities.

Measures:

Operating Surplus

Our Students and Community

Students emerge confident in their value and capability

Students know their pathway to contributing to a just tomorrow

Result Statement:

Our First Nations students understand the Biblical message and its relevance to them, know where they come from, and are capable and confident in who they are. They have the grace, voice and resilience to bridge worlds, enriching the whole community.

First Nations cultures have had a transformative impact on our whole school identity - graduates, staff and parents, regardless of cultural heritage, emerge with a deep commitment to restoration and healing.

Measures:

Student Career Mentoring
TSAS Internship

Result Statement:

Embracing their God-given gifts and cultural assets, our students emerge passionate about their futures. Equipped to navigate difference, students have the necessary credentials to pursue further education and employment, living lives of purpose and influence, with the connections and character to champion a just tomorrow.

Measures:

Post School Pathways
Post School Employment/Training





GAWURA
SCHOOL



ST ANDREW'S
CATHEDRAL SCHOOL

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