

Nomination of Jervis Bay School for the Arthur Hamilton Award:

Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

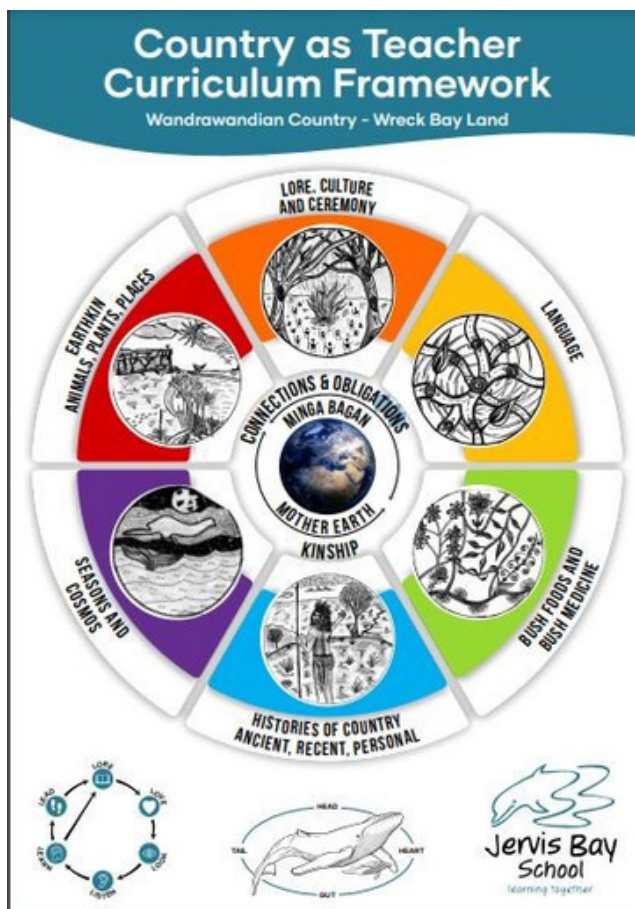
The AEU ACT Branch, on the recommendation of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, proudly nominates Jervis Bay School as a most worthy recipient of the Arthur Hamilton Award.

Jervis Bay School demonstrates a sustained, whole-school commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, delivering transformative educational outcomes, and fostering stronger connections between the school, community, and Country. Its pioneering approach through the Country as Teacher program has not only transformed its own school community but has also created a positive ripple effect across the South Coast region of NSW.

Jervis Bay School is part of the ACT public school system. It is located on the Bherwerre Peninsula on Aboriginal land of Booderee National Park. Initially established as a school for children of naval personnel from the adjoining naval base, the school has evolved over time into a diverse and inclusive school that caters for students living in Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community, HMAS Creswell, the Jervis Bay Village and surrounding NSW villages. With 90% Aboriginal student enrolment, the school has the highest proportion of Indigenous enrolment of all ACT schools.

Implementing a Whole-School Approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education

- Under the leadership of Principal (and former AEU ACT Branch President) Lana Read, Jervis Bay School has established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge as a central pillar of its curriculum, pedagogy, and culture.
- As a pilot school for the Country as Teacher program, Jervis Bay School has demonstrated leadership in adopting and refining place-based, culturally grounded pedagogy, setting a benchmark for other schools across the ACT and NSW.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing are authentically integrated across subjects, ensuring that all students experience education grounded in Country and culture.
- The school's investment in staff capacity building is evident, with multiple staff members completing the Graduate Certificate in Country as Teacher, embedding advanced expertise and cultural integrity throughout the teaching team.



Country as Teacher is a curriculum framework for connecting with, learning from, and caring for Country. This is a two-way curriculum, which aims to balance the education of our young people by building on the knowledge of the past, and embracing ancient ways of knowing and doing.

Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

- The integration of Country as Teacher has led to improved student engagement, attendance, and learning outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who see their culture and identities authentically reflected in their education.
- The school has experienced a significant increase in enrolments, indicating growing community confidence and recognition of its success in delivering culturally responsive education.
- Students are developing leadership, resilience, and cultural pride through a curriculum that prioritises connection to Country and knowledge from Elders and community members.

Behavioural Engagement of Students

(ACT Government School Satisfaction and Climate Survey)

The percentage of strong responses from students increased from 76% in 2021 to 83% in 2025.

Attendance

Average student attendance has increased from 66% in 2021 to 80% in 2025, noting that more than 50% of students have an attendance rate of between 90 and 100%.

Learning outcomes

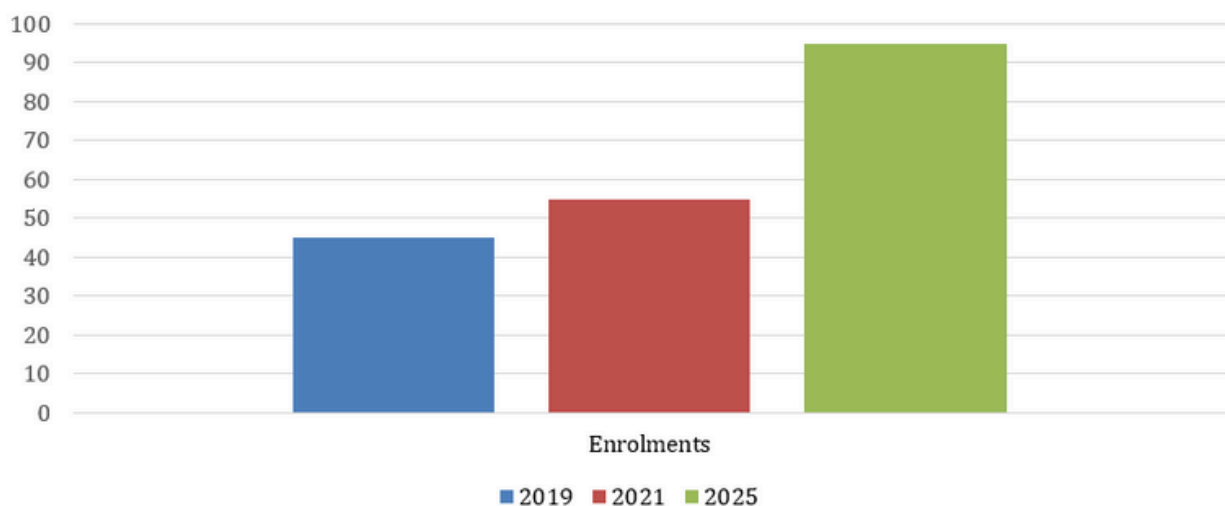
Student grades in English and mathematics have improved substantially over the period 2023 to 2025.

In 2023 for English, 55% of students achieved a C grade or above. By 2025, 67% of students achieved a C grade or above.

In 2023 for mathematics, 54% of student achieve a C grade or above. By 2025, 69% of students achieved a C grade or above.

A 'C' grade shows that the student has met the standard for that subject.

Jervis Bay School, student enrolments, 2019, 2021 & 2025



Improving Engagement of Parents, Elders, and the Community in Decision-Making

- Deep partnerships with the Aboriginal community are central to Jervis Bay's success. Elders, parents, and carers are actively engaged in planning, governance, and cultural initiatives.
- The employment of Uncle Matty Sims, a respected cultural leader, demonstrates the school's commitment to embedding Aboriginal voices and knowledge into decision-making and daily teaching.
- This collaboration has created a school environment that is culturally safe, inclusive, and trusted by families, positioning the school as a cultural and educational hub for the wider community.

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- Local Elders, knowledge holders and community members are involved in ensuring Country as Teacher lessons are authentic and relevant
- Units of work and teaching and learning programs are co-created with members of Booderee National Park and the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council
 - The decision to teach the dhurga language was influenced by local community and offered in partnership with local schools
 - In Preschool the Sounds, Words, Aboriginal Language and Yarning program is used to embed local Aboriginal language, culture and stories to develop and improve oral language and literacy skills.

Developing and Implementing Innovative Programs

- Jervis Bay School's Learning on Country and Country as Teacher programs represent an innovative, world-leading approach to education that repositions Country as the primary teacher.
- The school has played a critical role as a pilot site, co-designing and demonstrating the impact of these pedagogies, which are now being adopted by other schools along the NSW South Coast.
- This ripple effect is fostering regional transformation, strengthening cultural continuity, and contributing to positive educational outcomes and community pride across multiple school communities.
- Jervis Bay's leadership in this area has created a replicable model of culturally responsive education, inspiring schools and educators beyond its immediate network.



Picture: Uncle Matty Simms provides in-school support for students and staff 3 days per week, placing Country at the centre of the curriculum. Students learn traditional dance, songlines, language, art and artefacts and Uncle Matty supports all staff to develop strong First Nations perspectives.

Conclusion

Jervis Bay School stands as a leading example of excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Its transformation has been driven by the strategic vision of Principal Lana Read, the expertise of staff trained through the Graduate Certificate in Country as Teacher, and the invaluable cultural leadership of Uncle Matty Sims. The school's pioneering role in the Country as Teacher initiative has not only delivered significant benefits for its own students and families but has created a regional ripple effect, with neighbouring schools also embedding these pedagogies and strengthening their connection to Country and culture. Jervis Bay School is a model of innovation, authenticity, and community-led transformation that continues to elevate education outcomes and cultural integrity in the ACT as well as across the NSW South Coast and beyond.