

# Advice for beginning teachers working in remote settings

If you are thinking about or preparing to live and teach in a remote community, the following resources are intended to provide information, insights and advice to support your understanding of your community and teaching contexts

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## Who can help me with classroom management in a remote community setting?

In a remote community context, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators know the students, their families, and the community. They can help non-local teachers understand changes to a particular child's behaviour, attention, or motivation. Students, families, and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are used to non-local teachers coming to and leaving the community, so often it is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who are the long-term employees and provide continuity of presence and routine for the students.

It is important to approach classroom management in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way. Work in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to build trust and rapport with students and develop culturally appropriate understandings around classroom management practices and strategies. Be flexible to adapt these as your relationships and understandings develop. Consider that local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are more than likely related to many students in the educational setting.

As with any cohort, it is important to work with students and agree to a series of behaviours, and consequences to both positive and negative behaviours that is expected of everyone in the classroom.

"It is best practice to involve families in any proactive and reactive behaviour management strategies that impact on their children." (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

"Having a combined approach to classroom management is essential in creating engaging learning spaces. It is not solely the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator's responsibility to manage student behaviours. Using the language of the school's values to create positive behaviours and expectations is much more powerful than creating class rules in the negative." (Teaching Principal, NT).

### Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)

- **4.2** Manage classroom activities
- **4.3** Manage challenging behaviour

## How can I successfully communicate and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers?

You can learn a lot from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, as they are part of the community and are the link with families.

Work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to plan opportunities for families to meet the teaching team or hold meet and greet events out in the community. This may help build relationships and support families to feel comfortable in getting to know new non-local teachers.

Suggestions for engaging parents and carers in their child's education:

- when you see family or carers in the community, comment positively on their child's education experience
- involve families within the class programs where possible
- have open door policies so that parents and carers can see positive learning experiences

- send home positive notes for the students to share with their families.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators use existing relationships to support parents to be actively engaged in their children’s education. They use culturally appropriate ways to include parents in the education process.” (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers

## **How can I learn about the context I’ll be teaching in, in a remote community setting?**

Remote communities and schools are places where different cultures, languages and educational experiences combine. Support is available to help non-local teachers adjust to living in a remote community and working with new colleagues. The relationships built with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can have a positive impact on living, learning about and enjoying work in a remote community.

Most educational settings will have an induction program for new non-local teachers to learn about the community context and specific cultural practices. Being culturally responsive helps create a safe environment where children and young people can celebrate their culture and identity, making learning more relevant and increasing engagement.

### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

## **How can I make sure my teaching meets the needs of the students in a remote community setting?**

Consider how the knowledge, skills and experiences students bring can be valued in the teaching and learning program. Like any cohort of students you are teaching, you need to have high expectations about what each student can achieve.

“Find out what has gone on before – in the school and in the classroom – and build on that. High expectations accompany high achievement.” (Remote educator, NT).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators know the students and how they learn. It is important to work as a team to develop suitable teaching methods, contextualised programs, and engaging activities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are able to bring a cultural lens with how the curriculum can be integrated with the local culture and context. Some learning areas may require

more unpacking than others to ensure shared understanding and links to local ways of being, knowing and doing.

Effective planning involves teams thinking about, talking about, and making decisions about the what, the why and the how of teaching and learning as well as preparing resources and practising activities. It is ideal to set time aside for the teaching team to reflect on the day's teaching and to plan and prepare for the next day.

Integrating local culture perspectives in learning provides opportunities to explore curriculum content in a way that is relevant and meaningful for students.

“Learning is not separated from language and country as both are integral to world views and identity. Significant places and stories help interpret and teach vital lessons” (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

“When teaching science in ESL classrooms, there is a much greater chance that students will develop misconceptions because of the use of two languages and two bodies of scientific knowledge. We must provide structured experiences and learning environments, so there are opportunities for students to test out their ideas and prove the correct concept to themselves” (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- 1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students
- 1.2 Understand how students learn
- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities

## **How can I make sure I continue to grow as a teacher in a remote community setting?**

“Come with an open mind and remain that way. Preconceived notions of community life, or thinking you know how things are because of what you've read or heard can limit your ability to listen to what people are saying, or understand the context of situations.” (Remote educator, NT).

Cultural competence grows through listening, self-awareness, experience, respect, non-judgmental attitude, empathy, quiet observations, acceptance of confusion, and taking time to understand difference. An important way to develop cultural awareness is learning about kinship and skin names to understand how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator, your students and community members are connected to each other and country.

In cross-cultural situations, it is important to make time for learning together to build relationships, improve communication and create shared understandings.

### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
  - 3.3 Use a range of teacher strategies
  - 3.5 Use effective classroom communication
- 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice**

## How can I build relationships with students who come from different cultures, language and education experiences?

A high proportion of students may have first languages that are different to the language of instruction. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who speak community languages and Standard Australian English can advise and support understandings about students and effective ways to communicate.

“Relationships guide the way people interact. Local Aboriginal educators know, respect and use personal and professional relationships to enhance the learning environment. This includes their relationships with students; students’ relationships with each other; as well as relationships within the teaching team” (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

### Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)

- 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds
- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- 3.5 Use effective classroom communication

## Who will I be working with in a remote community setting?

Remote community schools have unique needs and characteristics. Many remote schools are located within culturally rich communities. A high proportion of students may speak one or more first languages that are different to the language of instruction. The number of staff in remote community settings will vary according to the size as well as specific programs, such as language and culture, that may require particular expertise. In general, you will work with leaders, teaching colleagues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and other classroom support staff, as well as with community members.

Many remote community settings employ local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to work together with non-local teachers to team-teach students in settings with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Working in teams helps to build strong collaborative relationships between team members and create classroom environments that promote effective learning outcomes for students.

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators provide strong links between non-local teachers, the students, their families, and other community members. Being part of the local community means that local educators manage family and cultural obligations as well as their roles in the educational setting

“If you don’t have an Assistant Teacher within your classroom, make connections with those within the school. Sit with them to learn more about your students. Make time to chat within the community with Elders and family members. Connect with your leadership team, colleagues, and other staff members, to build your knowledge of the community and your students. The more you know about your students, the school staff, and the families, the more engaged you become. Your engagement is reflected in your commitment to teaching these students. In these community settings, people notice. And above all, enjoy the experience.” (Retired Teaching Principal, NT).

### Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)

- **2.4** Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- **6.3** Engage with colleagues and improve practice

## How will I establish a relationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators that I will be working with?

It is important to develop shared understandings around teaching and learning, from both perspectives, leading to effective communication and learning opportunities for students. Building a productive way of working as a team is critical to the success of a teaching team. It is important to remember that developing respectful and trusting relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can take time and effort and is ongoing.

“Having that relationship with each other – being open – if you don’t have that relationship, things might fall apart.” (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

Teaching teams can establish and build strong relationships through regular catch-ups. It is important that, in these interactions, you let the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person speak first and come with an open mind. If you strongly project an idea, they may feel uncomfortable and agree in order to avoid confrontation rather than because they agree with the idea itself. In these catch-ups, it is important you:

- identify common interests and share experiences inside and outside of educational setting
- learn about each other’s motivation to be an educator
- learn about what interests and skills you both bring to your roles, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators will not feel comfortable reading and writing, but may have brilliant ideas to integrate culture into learning, so it is important you respect this
- find out about the professional experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who may have been working within the setting for many years
- communicate clearly and check each other’s understandings so that both parties have the same expectations
- provide time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to respond to questions and absorb new information, as Standard Australian English may not be their first language, and they, like anyone else, will want to fully understand and consider their response before replying.
- negotiate roles and responsibilities so that team members are comfortable with their duties

It is important that all interactions are appropriate and respectful. In many communities, this involves how non-locals present themselves through the clothes they wear, how they speak and what they do on the weekend.

“Working well in an Indigenous community school means working respectfully. Think outside your culture and be open to teaching, learning, and working both ways.” (Remote educator, NT).

“Developing relationships with assistant teachers, support staff, students and community members is the key. Understanding kinships is embedded within these. Take your time to develop these, don’t rush, slow down and make time to listen!” (Retired Teaching Principal, NT).

#### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- **2.4** Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- **6.3** Engage with colleagues and improve practice

## **How do I choose the best ways to assess student learning in a remote community setting?**

As with any classroom in Australia, it is important that the teaching team uses evidence of student learning for planning what to teach. This evidence will also inform the design of assessment tasks – who does what with class groups and how to approach individual observations. It is ideal to set aside regular time for the team to reflect and share observations about individual students. Consider conducting verbal/practical assessment rather than being heavily reliant on written evidence of learning. The most important thing is that students have opportunities to demonstrate what they have learnt.

#### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- 1.2 Understand how students learn
- 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- **5.1** Assess student learning

## **How do I know what teaching strategies and resources to use in a remote community setting?**

Working with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators enables you to develop suitable teaching methods, contextualised programs, and engaging activities. This will ensure culturally responsive educational experiences for students to engage with and access the curriculum, participate in learning, and achieve positive learning outcomes.

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can utilise the languages in the classroom to develop deep understanding and encourage high order thinking. Interweaving first language and Standard Australian English in instruction, explanation, group discussion and reflection gives students numerous opportunities to understand curriculum content and develop language abilities.’ (Aboriginal teacher, NT).

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators know the local cultural setting, linguistic background, and stories of the students they teach and use this knowledge to inform which teaching strategies they use. Learning through language and culture has a strong focus on ‘how’ knowledge is transmitted.

“Engage students with story sharing, use of visual representation and making connections with country. New ideas and understandings are formed using existing knowledge and perspectives as a link to the ‘cultural interface’ or common ground between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and doing.” (Aboriginal teacher, NT)

#### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- **1.3** Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- **1.4** Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- **3.3** Use teaching strategies

## **How do I make sure what I plan is appropriate for students in a remote community setting?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators provide learning suggestions relevant to cultural knowledge. They understand local ways of being, knowing and doing and can provide or seek advice from community members about cultural considerations and incorporating local content into the learning program.

Effective planning involves teams thinking about, talking about, and making decisions about the what, the why and the how of teaching and learning and preparing resources and practising activities. It is ideal to set aside time for the teaching team to reflect on the day’s teaching and to plan and prepare for the next day. Planning together will support the team to teach and assess together, with each member taking responsibility for student learning.

#### **Teacher Professional standards (Graduate)**

- **1.4** Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- **3.1** Establish challenging learning goals
- **3.2** Plan, structure and sequence learning program