

NSW Department of Education Procedures for Supporting Refugee Students

At Illaroo Road Public School we acknowledge the importance of effectively supporting the educational and welfare needs of refugee students.

- Resettlement support is critical in enabling refugees to overcome the impacts of trauma and adjust to life in Australia. All schools with refugee students have a responsibility to ensure that appropriate support is provided to meet their educational and welfare needs.

A coordinated school response

- A coordinated response to supporting refugee students is important because refugee students will have educational, physical, social and emotional needs. This response should be coordinated by executive staff and key personnel.
- Early information, including data about prior experiences of schooling and current wellbeing can assist schools in identifying the support needed by students. Most refugee students will require EAL/D teaching support. Others may require additional learning support.
- Most refugee students will need support from the school counsellor; some may need referral for specialist trauma counselling. School counsellors can make referrals and gain access to professional support from the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).
- Schools should develop individual learning plans for refugee students, to ensure appropriate and coordinated support is provided and relevant information about students is provided to teachers and other staff.
- Schools enrolling refugee students receive resources to provide English as an additional language support as well as resources to provide targeted support for refugee students. The level of resourcing each school receives depends on the number of refugee students enrolled and their reported level of English language need.
- A coordinated school response should consider specific strategies targeting the educational, physical, social and emotional wellbeing of refugee students such as those listed below.

Emotional wellbeing

- ✓ build a sense of safety, belonging and acceptance by making students and their families feel welcome in the school
- ✓ allow time and support to build trusting relationships and adjust to the new country
- ✓ assist students in understanding and coming to terms with the impacts of ongoing grief and trauma

Educational support

- ✓ intensive English language support
- ✓ support to develop literacy and numeracy skills; curriculum concepts
- ✓ bilingual support
- ✓ first language maintenance through community language classes
- ✓ learning programs to 'bridge the gaps' caused by disrupted schooling
- ✓ explicit instruction about expectations in relation to schooling, learning and school discipline in Australian schools
- ✓ direct opportunities to experience and develop social skills and strategies in the classroom learning activities
- ✓ structured lessons that support learning through making expectations explicit, (including social rules, behaviours, class work, homework and assignments)

Social support

- ✓ inclusion of students in peer support strategies
- ✓ school social activities that support participation of refugee students
- ✓ classroom strategies that promote and support cooperative learning
- ✓ linking to community organisations, resources and support

- ✓ referral to agencies for support in family settlement needs

Physical

- ✓ monitor ongoing physical wellbeing of students
- ✓ health screening – through GPs or refugee health clinics
- ✓ information and advice about nutrition, dental health, hygiene
- ✓ referral to support agencies and service providers when remediable physical injuries or conditions continue
- ✓ adjustments to school equipment during rehabilitation programs for injuries or permanent disabilities.

Schools should use existing team structures such as the school learning and support team to coordinate this support.

Enrolling refugee students

- The enrolment of refugee students as soon as possible after their arrival in Australia is critical for their successful settlement. The structures and routines associated with attending school and the relationships formed with staff and students can be a stable and positive influence on young people at this time.
- To enable the collection of relevant information on enrolment and appropriate assessment of students' needs, it is suggested that a nominated staff member be involved in enrolling refugee students, such as an EAL/D teacher or member of the school welfare team.
- Make sure an interpreter is available, if required. If necessary use telephone interpreting and book an interpreter for another day. Advice on interpreter services is available on the Department's Internet website: <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/adminsupport/intertranslate.php>
- If this is the student's first enrolment in a NSW government school, assist the family to fill out the *application to enrol in a NSW government school* form. This form, translated into a range of languages, can be downloaded from the Department's website: <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/>.
- Make contact with the family's caseworker and get their contact details to assist in communicating with the family.
- Ensure key school personnel, e.g. the school counsellor, an EAL/D teacher and welfare coordinator are informed when a refugee student is enrolling.
- Ensure other relevant information about a student's background, interests and talents, family situation and previous education is collected to inform the development of the student's individual learning plan. Show sensitivity when asking questions—refugee students and their families may not feel safe providing personal information until they have developed a trusting relationship with school personnel.
- Provide information about the school in first language if possible. This could include details of the uniform, bell times, activities, school rules and expectations, staff, homework and support provided for students.

Developing individual learning plans

- Most refugee students need support in learning English as an additional language and many have emotional, welfare and other educational support needs as a result of their refugee experiences and disrupted or limited prior schooling. The process of developing individual learning plans for refugee students can help ensure that information about students is collected and appropriate learning support is provided by people with the appropriate expertise and area of responsibility.

Monitoring student behaviour

Refugee students' capacity to cope with traumatic experiences varies greatly. This capacity to cope and the degree to which the learning of a student is influenced by previous trauma depends on factors such as:

- the severity of previous experiences
- the number of traumas and the length of time they were suffered
- whether parents or close family members were killed, injured or disappeared

- the resilience of the individual in adjusting to new environments
- how well the student's carers are coping with their trauma, resettlement and anxieties about family members in the home country
- how well the individual student is being supported in their new country at home, at school and in the local community

Ensure all teachers develop awareness about refugee students in their classes

- Some refugee students enrolling in Australian schools need considerable assistance to overcome a range of difficulties that are the result of trauma, physical hardships, missed or disrupted schooling or the loss of familial and social supports. Teachers are pivotal in providing this assistance.
- Teachers should inform themselves about the backgrounds of refugee students in their classes and the impact of refugee experiences. They should not assume that all refugee students need the same level and types of support. Students should be considered as individuals and conclusions about their capabilities or future pathways need to be reached through careful assessments over a period of time.
- The following strategies can assist teachers in providing appropriate support:
 - ✓ Allow time for refugee students to recover and adjust to life in Australia
 - ✓ Understand the impact of trauma
 - ✓ Consider English language proficiency as an influence on student learning
 - ✓ Differentiate assessment and teaching and learning programs
 - ✓ Monitor changes in student needs over time

Provide professional learning for staff

- Assisting refugees to settle into life in Australia can be a complex and long-term process. Teachers can make a significant contribution by taking notice of their interactions with refugee students and adapting to students' changing needs over time. Teachers should also seek out opportunities for professional learning about teaching EAL/D and refugee students.

Involve the school counsellor

- The impacts of trauma can seriously affect the capacity of young people to concentrate, participate and perform academically and socially at school. The educational response to students with such backgrounds needs to be multifaceted, incorporating contributions from the school's leadership, curriculum, literacy, learning support and student welfare teams. In this context, the professional expertise and insights provided by the school counsellor will aid in delivering quality interventions for refugee students.

Seek advice

- Refer students and families to support from government and community agencies. There is a large range of government and non-government service providers who support refugee students and their families. Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) can provide information about the organisations providing this support in your local area.

Support refugee parents and families

- A welcoming atmosphere is important for newly arrived refugee parents. They need to be confident that their children are safe in school in order to develop trust in the school and its staff. Ensuring that school staff members, particularly front office personnel, are trained in communicating with parents whose first language is not English, and in accessing and using interpreters, is an effective strategy.
- Providing interpreter assistance when required and translated documents when available are important first steps. Interpreting and translation services are provided for parents and carers who do not speak or understand English well. A large number of publications have been translated in up to 40 languages and are available on the NSW Department of Education and Communities website.
- When refugee families are settling successfully into Australia, their children learn more effectively. It is important for schools to support refugee families in the resettlement process and to encourage their participation in school activities.

- A number of community agencies provide support to newly arrived refugee families. Schools should be aware of these agencies and their roles, and refer refugee families to appropriate agencies when required.
- Schools might like to consider conducting Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) courses for newly arrived migrant and refugee parents. This group program is interactive and is designed to help participants to understand the impact of resettlement on the family and family dynamics.