Targeted support for students from a refugee background
Information for primary schools - 2017

Background

Enrolling in a primary school in Australia is for most refugee students their first experience of schooling. These students may need intensive support to help them to adjust to school and to develop the English language and literacy skills they will need for their continuing education.

Schools enrolling refugee students receive resources through the Equity Loading for English language proficiency to provide English as an Additional Language support. The level of resourcing each school receives depends on the number of EAL/D students enrolled and their reported level of English language need.

Schools with recently arrived refugee students also receive targeted (individual student) funding through the RAM to provide targeted support for these students.

Targeted (individual student) funding

The targeted (individual student) funding for refugee students assists schools to provide additional support for refugee students in their first three years in Australia. This supports students’ transition to school and participation in mainstream education programs and the broader community.

Resources can be used to provide an orientation to school in Australia, ongoing EAL/D teaching support literacy and numeracy support or a range of programs and strategies to meet students’ other wellbeing and learning needs.

Schools are required to plan and report on how they use the targeted resources to improve wellbeing and educational outcomes for their refugee students, as part of the annual school planning and reporting process.

Targeted support for students

Schools enrolling refugee students should develop programs and strategies to meet their identified wellbeing and learning needs. The primary focus of educational support for refugee students should be the development of students’ English language and literacy skills, to enable them to participate effectively in mainstream schooling.

English language and literacy teaching should focus on both oral and written language and include:

- developing reading, writing, listening and speaking skills for a range of purposes, contexts and audiences.
- developing knowledge and control of language structures and features of a range of text types including the grammar, vocabulary and graphophonic systems.

The teaching programs developed should be curriculum based, with an emphasis on helping students acquire the literacies, concepts and skills needed to participate in learning activities and meet mainstream curriculum outcomes.

Organisation of these programs will take into account the needs of the students, their ages and school years and other EAL/D, literacy and student wellbeing programs available in the school.

The targeted support provided for refugee students should complement, but not replace, the school’s existing EAL/D program. Refugee students receiving targeted support should also continue to be supported through the school’s EAL/D program.
Student target group

Schools will identify refugee students to receive additional support. The numbers of students included will depend on the nature of the programs and strategies being implemented. Students targeted should be refugee or ‘refugee like’ students who:

- have had limited schooling in their first language (in particular older students - Years 3, 4, 5 or 6)
- have low levels of literacy in English
- have been in an Australian school for less than three years.

Background information about students as well as wellbeing and assessment data should be used to develop personalised approaches.

Targeted students should be supported and monitored during their transition to school by the school’s Learning and Support Team.

Delivery models

Each school should use the resources provided to deliver a planned and integrated program to meet the needs of the targeted refugee students.

Schools will decide on the most appropriate teaching support model for their school, taking into account the needs of their students, their ages and school years and other EAL/D, literacy and social support programs available within the school.

To be successful, planning the targeted support should be seen as an integral part of the school’s planning and reporting process and be supported by the principal and school leadership team.

Coordination of the targeted support

A member of the executive staff should have responsibility for coordinating this support by:

- helping to identify students to receive the additional support
- coordinating the development of the content and timetable
- monitoring and reporting on strategies implemented to the school executive
- promoting the integration of these strategies within the school
- coordinating professional development for teachers about supporting refugee students
- coordinating the collection of data and evidence to report on student learning and wellbeing
- developing strategies to ensure sustainability.

Additional teaching support

Additional teaching support for targeted refugee students during their transition to school in Australia is one strategy that can be implemented. Where possible, this should be provided by qualified and experienced EAL/D teacher/s.

Teachers who undertake this role should have:

- EAL teaching qualifications and experience
- a thorough understanding of EAL pedagogy
- understanding of and empathy for the needs of refugee students
- a strong commitment to improving refugee student learning outcomes
- capacity to build links with parents and the community.

Teachers who undertake this role should be responsible for:

- assisting to identify student target group
- assessing student wellbeing and learning needs
- developing program content and timetable
- developing personalised support for targeted students
- monitoring students’ educational and welfare needs
- liaising with the school Learning and Support Team and other staff
- reporting on student wellbeing and learning
- liaising with external organizations.
Planning the targeted support

Each school should develop a plan for the programs and strategies to be implemented. This should include:

- intended outcomes of programs and strategies
- targeted students
- staff involved - roles and responsibilities
- support components and timetable
- assessment and reporting procedures
- procedures for monitoring of student attendance, wellbeing and achievement.

Schools should also report on programs and strategies implemented in their school plan.

Developing a personalised approach

A planning template is available to help schools in developing personalised approaches to learning and wellbeing for students from a refugee background. Planning for personalised student support should be done in consultation with subject teachers, the Learning and Support Team, students and their families.

Teacher observations, oral and written work samples and other relevant wellbeing and assessment data should be collected to inform programming and enable staff to monitor and report on each student’s progress and achievements.

Nominated staff should be responsible for collecting relevant information and data about the student’s educational and welfare needs. Initially, the following information about students should be collected:

- visa class and subclass
- amount of schooling prior to arrival in Australia
- language/s spoken at home and level of literacy in home language/s
- relevant refugee experiences or other welfare issues that may impact on learning
- family situation and responsibilities
- English language proficiency (ESL Scales /EAL/D Learning Progression).

This information should be recorded in a student learning plan. Details of the support to be provided, the time frame and personnel to be involved should also be included.

Relevant information about students and the learning and wellbeing goals established through this process should be communicated to all staff involved in teaching and supporting the student. Staff involved should be aware of Departmental requirements regarding privacy and confidentiality of personal information.

Development of teaching programs

The main aim of the targeted support provided for refugee students is to support their settlement and to develop their English language competence to enable their participation in mainstream classes.

Links to other school programs

English as an Additional Language program

Any additional EAL/D support provided through this initiative should complement, but not replace, the school’s existing EAL/D program. Participating students should also continue to receive support through the school’s EAL/D program.

Literacy programs

Many refugee students can benefit from additional support to develop their literacy skills however literacy programs are often written for native English speakers. An EAL/D student’s English language level and cultural knowledge needs to inform implementation of these programs.

Positive behaviour for learning is a process for developing practices and systems that promotes school-wide positive behaviours. It can help schools create safe and supportive learning environments for refugee students.

Communication with parents/guardians

Students and their parents/guardians should be informed, and wherever possible, be involved in decision making about their child’s educational program. It is suggested that schools organise meetings with parents to explain the purpose of the programs and support being provided.

Use of interpreters, translations and culturally appropriate methods of communication should be used to encourage parents’/guardians’ attendance at these meetings. Parents / guardians should be given the opportunity to ask questions and communicate any concerns they may have about their child’s wellbeing, educational progress and career plans.

Schools are encouraged to use interpreters to assist in communicating with parents or carers who do not speak or understand English well. Information about booking interpreters can be found at:

Professional learning

A number of professional learning programs are available for executive staff and teachers of students from refugee backgrounds.

**STARS in Schools: Supporting students from refugee backgrounds**

This is a 5 hour professional learning course that aims to raise awareness about refugee students and their experiences and assist schools to create learning environments which support their recovery. Participants will develop strategies for responding with sensitivity to behavioural issues that may arise in relation to students’ emotional and learning needs.

Professional learning modules have been developed to assist in delivering training for school staff. School counsellors, behaviour support personnel, school executive and Learning and Support Team members can be trained as facilitators.

**Teaching students from a refugee background**

This is a 20 hour registered professional learning course designed for classroom teachers, K-12, to develop their understanding of the educational needs of refugee students in order to provide effective teaching support.

The course aims to develop participants’ understandings of the experiences, skills and knowledge that refugee students bring to school as well as the language related needs of recently arrived refugee students with low levels of literacy.

It assists teachers to develop skills, knowledge and understandings for effective teaching of refugee students in the mainstream classroom. It also increases their awareness of specialist personnel, external agencies, training programs and resources available to support refugee students.

For more information:

Jane Wallace
Refugee Student Programs Advisor
NSW Department of Education
Phone: 9266 8445
jane.m.wallace@det.nsw.edu.au