Explicit teaching
Driving learning and engagement

NSW GOVERNMENT

What is explicit teaching?

Explicit teaching consists of a set of principles that inform a range of dynamic and responsive teaching strategies. It involves:

Teachers clearly explaining, demonstrating and modelling to students:

- why they are learning something
- what their learning goals are
- how it connects to what they already know
- what they are expected to do
- how to do it
- what it looks like when they have succeeded.

Students being given opportunities and time to:

- show their understanding of what has been taught
- ask questions to clarify and build understanding
- practise using skills and knowledge they have learnt
- receive clear, timely, effective feedback.

Explicit teaching is a quality teaching practice in What Works Best

What works best

The 8 What Works Best (2020) effective practices overlap and connect with one another. When implemented together they provide a framework for teachers to connect students with the curriculum and to improve student achievement and skills.


Explicit teaching drives school excellence

Explicit teaching is a key part of our Plan for NSW Public Education and the School Excellence Framework (SEF).

What does excelling in the adoption of explicit teaching in the SEF look like?

'Teachers consider students' cognitive load and employ explicit teaching strategies to optimise learning progress of students across the full range of abilities. Effective methods are identified, promoted and modelled, and students' learning improvement is monitored, demonstrating growth.' (Teaching Domain, p 11).

School Excellence Framework data shows that while a proportion of schools self-assess as having excellent practice in explicit teaching and feedback, a larger proportion of schools identify the need for improvement in these key areas.

NSW Department of Education

School Excellence Framework
Version 3
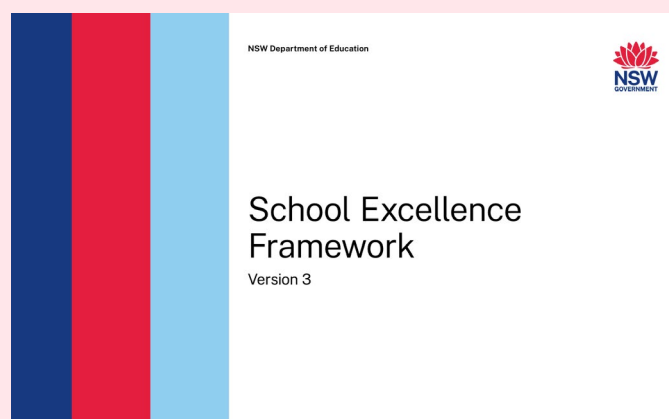
Why does explicit teaching work?

Explicit teaching is supported by longstanding evidence from cognitive science and educational psychology (Clark et al. 2012 [PDF 150KB]; Evans and Martin 2023).

The large body of evidence indicates that the structured and systematic approach of explicit teaching aligns with how students process, store, and retrieve information.

Explicit teaching is an effective strategy for managing the cognitive load students experience when learning new or complex concepts and skills. When working memory is overloaded, there is a greater risk that the content being taught will not be understood by the learner, will be misinterpreted or confused, will not be effectively encoded in long-term memory, and that learning will be slowed down (Martin 2016).

What does the evidence say?

Explicit teaching:

- is the best way to teach students new or complex concepts and skills and provides the necessary building blocks for guided and independent practice (CESE 2017)
- actively engages students with high levels of guidance (Evans and Martin 2023)
- is dynamic and responsive to arising learning needs (AERO 2023; CESE 2017)
- does not preclude the use of other teaching strategies, but order and frequency are important (CESE 2020; Mourshed et al. 2017)
- should be used in most lessons, particularly in early stages of learning to build strong foundations (refer to the load reduction instruction framework by Martin and Evans 2018).

Explicit teaching supports all learners

When implemented effectively, explicit teaching works for all students across all year groups and ability levels (Martin 2016).

As noted in the High Potential and Gifted Education policy statement 1.1.1:

'High expectations and effective, explicit, evidence-based teaching create optimal learning environments where all students are challenged and engaged.'

Explicit teaching drives learning and engagement

Extensive research in both cognitive science and classroom practice shows that students who experience explicit teaching make **greater learning gains** than those who do not.

CESE research shows that explicit teaching improves learning by **motivating and engaging students:**

- It fosters students' self-confidence in their academic abilities, their growth goal setting and perseverance (CESE 2021).
- It supports students' adjustment when transitioning to high school (Martin et al. 2024).

In NSW, new CESE research analysing student voice of over 16,000 secondary students shows that explicit teaching improves learning gains in the short and long term.

* Compared to students who report they did not receive explicit teaching (CESE 2024).

Students who report receiving explicit teaching in Year 7 and who undertake NAPLAN in Year 7*

- are on average **1.8 months ahead** in learning in Year 7
- report **higher levels** of academic self-confidence (9pp) and perseverance (11pp) in Year 7
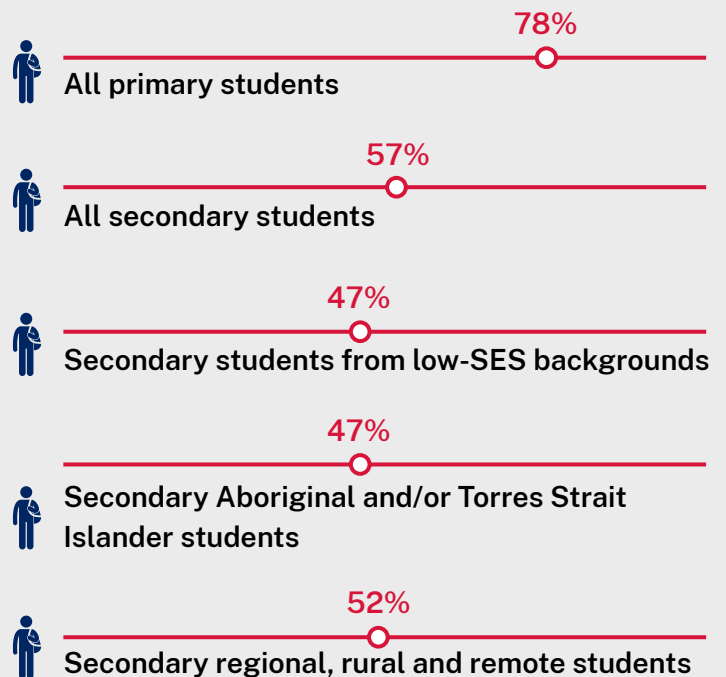- are on average **4 months ahead** in learning by Year 9.

Ensuring equity and excellence in NSW public schools

We know explicit teaching works, but students' perceptions of receiving it point to equity gaps, especially in secondary schools (CESE 2024).

Compared to the state average, fewer students from low socioeconomic status (SES) and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds as well as fewer students from regional, rural and remote schools report experiencing explicit teaching.
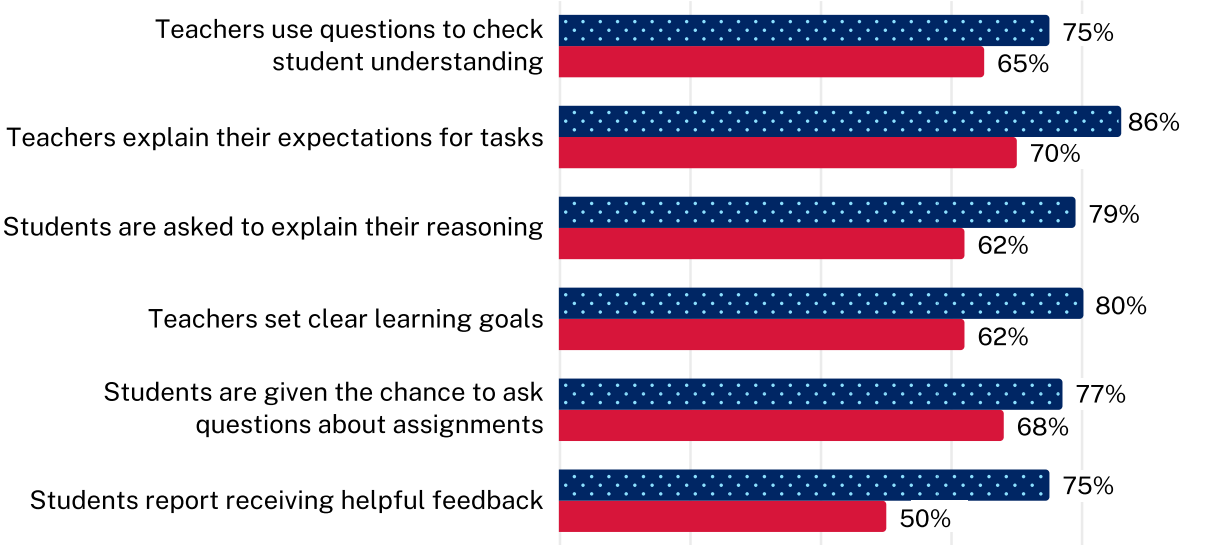
Proportion of students in NSW public schools who report receiving explicit teaching

78%
All primary students

57%
All secondary students

47%
Secondary students from low-SES backgrounds

47%
Secondary Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students

52%
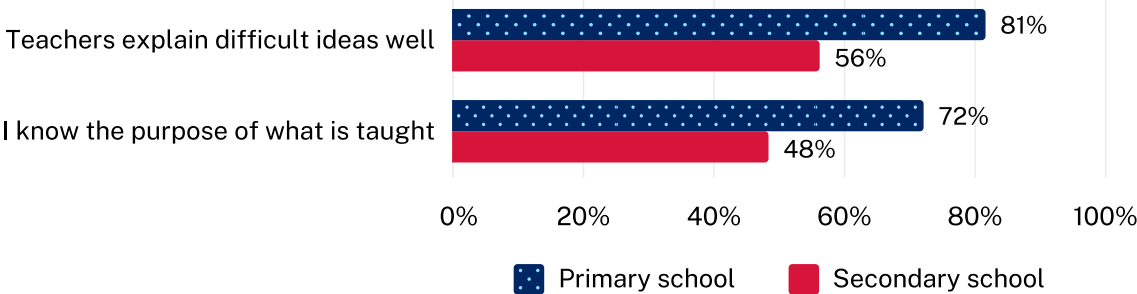**Secondary regional, rural and remote students**

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2023; 167,000 primary students and 197,000 secondary students surveyed.

Student voice – what are NSW public school students saying about their experiences of receiving explicit teaching?
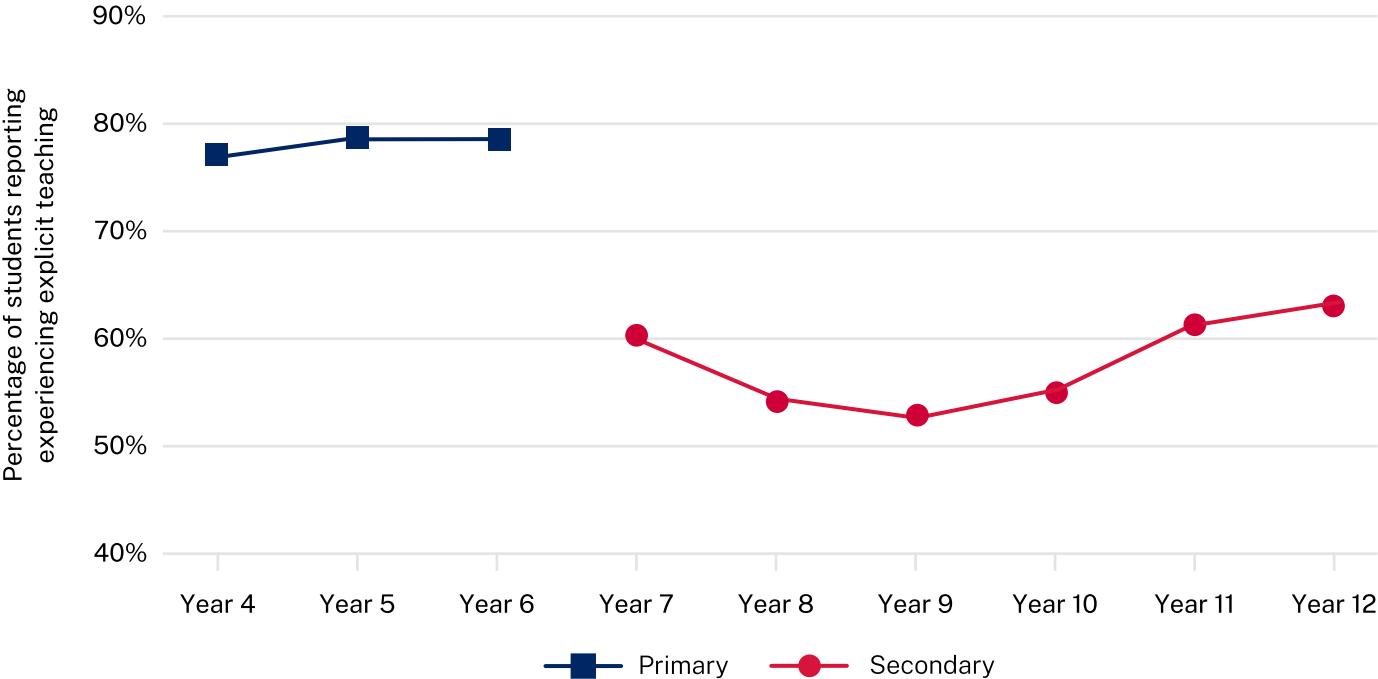
Most students experience explicit teaching practices regularly, with fewer students reporting receiving effective feedback or knowing the purpose of what is taught

Question	Primary school	Secondary school
Teachers use questions to check student understanding	75%	65%
Teachers explain their expectations for tasks	86%	70%
Students are asked to explain their reasoning	79%	62%
Teachers set clear learning goals	80%	62%
Students are given the chance to ask questions about assignments	77%	68%
Students report receiving helpful feedback	75%	50%

Additional questions on student experience of explicit teaching

Question	Primary school	Secondary school
Teachers explain difficult ideas well	81%	56%
I know the purpose of what is taught	72%	48%

Primary school ▪️ Secondary school ▪️

Students' experience of explicit teaching drops in secondary school

Percentage of students reporting experiencing explicit teaching

	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Primary	77%	79%	79%						
Secondary				60%	54%	53%	55%	61%	63%

■ Primary ● Secondary

Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, 2023; 167,000 primary students and 197,000 secondary students surveyed.

Student voice – explicit teaching

The department uses its flagship student voice survey, Tell Them From Me, to gather insights from students about their experiences of quality teaching practices, as set out in What Works Best. In 2023, 364,000 students from over 1,800 schools were surveyed.

The individual questions were selected to be representative of some of the core elements of explicit teaching (refer to page 4). They are not designed to be an all-encompassing measure of every explicit teaching practice.

The survey questions are designed by subject-matter experts, draw on PISA questions, and have been rigorously tested for reliability in peer-reviewed research (Martin et al. 2022; Collie at al 2023; Martin et al 2024).

How do I learn more about my school's Scout data on explicit teaching?

Principals and school leadership teams can access the What Works Best report. It includes school survey data on students' and teachers' experience of explicit teaching practices, and how often these practices are occurring in the classroom. This can be compared to the NSW average and statistically similar school groups (SSSG). In addition, there are reflection questions to support the interpretation of the data and references to specific resources to support strategies to improve practice.

Welcome to the Scout **What Works Best** app

scout

These reports provide selected annual results from the Tell Them From Me student and teacher surveys and School Excellence Framework Self-Assessment linked to each of the What Works Best themes.

Use the navigation on the left to view the reports. They are grouped into:
Please note that only Snapshot 1 **student** TTFM results are available in Scout reports.

- **Overview** - provides a summary indicator from TTFM for each What works best theme **NEW**

- **Thematic reports for each of the What Works Best themes** – provide an overview of student and teacher responses about relevant practices and comparisons to SSSG, NSW and network. **NEW**

Watch the instructional video on how to use the What Works Best app here

The reports complement other data schools can access through the Tell Them From Me portal. Face-to-face professional learning workshops are also available to schools.

For more information about the *Tell Them From Me* surveys and assistance in interpreting these reports, contact the TTFM team within the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) on 1300 131 499 or ttfm@det.nsw.edu.au.

If you have any feedback on improving the What Works Best reports in Scout, please email scout.feedback@det.nsw.edu.au

Support   Training   Yammer

CESE resources support NSW schools to implement explicit teaching

Further information on explicit teaching

Research base

- What Works Best – 2020 update (CESE 2020)
- Explicit teaching drives student motivation, engagement, and achievement in NSW public schools – a What Works Best research update (CESE 2024)
- Cognitive load theory: Research that teachers really need to understand (CESE 2017)
- How students learn best: An overview of the learning process and the most effective teaching practices (AERO 2023)
- Explicit instruction optimises learning (AERO 2023)
- Managing cognitive load optimises learning (AERO 2023)
- Knowledge is central to learning (AERO 2023)

Case study research

- Ambassador Schools research summary report (NSW DoE 2023) [PDF 805KB]
- Effective teaching practices at Balgowlah Boys Campus (CESE 2022)
- Blue Haven Public School (CESE 2019)

Implementation in schools

- What Works Best in practice (CESE 2020)
- Cognitive load theory in practice (CESE 2018)
- Explicit instruction: Guides and resources (AERO 2022)

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AERO (Australian Education Research Organisation) (2023) *How students learn best: An overview of the learning process and the most effective teaching practices*, AERO, accessed 1 March 2024.

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CESE (2020) *What Works Best – 2020 update*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 1 March 2024.

CESE (2021) *Growth goal setting – What Works Best in practice*, NSW Department of Education, accessed 22 March 2024.

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Collie R, Martin A, Flesken A and McCourt B (2023) 'Personal agency among students from low socio-economic backgrounds: An examination of student profiles, perceived teaching support, and achievement', *Social Psychology of Education*, doi:10.1007/s11218-023-09881-0.

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Jerrim J, Oliver M and Sims S (2022) 'The relationship between inquiry-based teaching and students' achievement. New evidence from a longitudinal PISA study in England', *Learning and Instruction*, 80:101310, doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2020.101310.

Martin A (2016) *Using Load Reduction Instruction (LRI) to boost motivation and engagement*, British Psychological Society, Leicester.

Martin A and Evans P (2018) 'Load reduction instruction: Exploring a framework that assesses explicit instruction through to independent learning', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 73:203-214, doi:10.1016/j.tate.2018.03.018.

Martin A, Burns E, Collie R, Bostwick K, Flesken A and McCarthy I (2022) 'Growth goal setting in high school: A large-scale study of perceived instructional support, personal background attributes, and engagement outcomes', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(4), 752–771, doi:10.1037/edu0000682.

Martin A, Collie R, Stephan M, Flesken A, Halcrow F and McCourt B (2024) 'The role of teaching support in assisting students' transitions to high school', *Learning and Individual Differences*, 109(2024):102382, doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102382.

Mourshed M, Krawitz M and Dorn E (2017) *How to improve student educational outcomes: New insights from data analytics*, McKinsey & Company, accessed 2 April 2024.

Sweller J, Zhang L, Ashman G, Cobern W and Kirschner PA (2023) 'Response to De Jong et al.'s (2023) paper "Let's talk evidence – The case for combining inquiry-based and direct instruction"', *Educational Research Review*, 42 (2024): 100584, doi:10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100584.

More information

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