

Australian Early Development Census

Frequently asked questions for families

What is the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)?

The AEDC is a population-based measure of how children in Australia have developed by the time they start school. Teachers complete a research tool, the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (Instrument) for each child in their class. The Instrument measures five key areas of early childhood development:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school based)
- communication skills and general knowledge.

These areas are closely linked to the predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

The Australian Government has endorsed the AEDC as a national progress measure of early childhood development in Australia.

Who is responsible for the AEDC?

The Australian Government and state and territory governments work in partnership with various organisations to deliver the AEDC. The Social Research Centre in Melbourne collects and manages the AEDC data.

Why is AEDC data collected?

The value of the AEDC is that it provides information for schools, communities and governments. This information helps identify needed services, resources and support for children and families to help shape the future and wellbeing of children in Australia.

The AEDC can also be used to monitor changes in the development of children in communities over time to understand how local circumstances might be changed to improve children's life chances.

How is the AEDC data collected?

Teachers complete the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument (Instrument) (similar to a questionnaire) for children in their first year of full-time school using a secure data entry system. The Instrument is completed based on the teacher's knowledge and observations of the children in their class. Children are not required to be present while teachers complete the Instrument. Schools are provided with funding for teacher relief time – it takes teachers around 20 minutes per student to complete each Instrument.

It is recommended that when completing the Instrument for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, the teacher consults with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Consultant, where possible. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Consultants bring unique cultural knowledge and are well placed to support teachers with completing the Instrument because of their personal understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's ways of learning and behaving.

Will my child's teacher have to complete the AEDC for my child?

The AEDC is an important, nationally completed census of early childhood development. In 2018, information was collected on nearly 309,000 children in their first year of school. Once completed, the AEDC provides information for communities, parents, schools and governments to more effectively allocate services, resources and support that children need.

AEDC results are shaping the design and application of early childhood programs and policies with the aim of making sure children are offered a safe, nurturing and learning environment where they can grow and thrive. We know that investing in resources to support children in their early years of life brings long-term benefits to them and the whole community. The AEDC is voluntary, is not a test and your child does not need to be present. The teacher completes the Instrument based on their observations and the results are grouped together so that the privacy of children, teachers and schools is maintained. Your child will not be individually identified in the data or reports.

Before each AEDC data collection starts parents/carers are provided with a letter letting them know if their child's school is going to participate. Parents/carers can notify the school if they do not want the teacher to complete the AEDC for their child.

Can I have my child's results removed from the collection database?

Yes. It is open to you to withdraw consent for your child's participation in the AEDC at any time. If you withdraw your consent, your child's information will be removed from the collection database. You can do this by contacting your child's school. However, if you withdraw your consent after the data is reported, your child's information cannot be removed.

Is my child's information held securely?

Yes. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) is the custodian of the AEDC data and implements data collection techniques, storage and reporting technologies that ensure the reliability and security of the AEDC data. Security rules (protocols) agreed between DESE and all contracted service providers require protection against unauthorised access and accidental destruction and modification of AEDC data.

Who do I contact if I have more questions about the privacy of my child's information or if I would like to make a complaint?

All enquiries and complaints about the privacy of AEDC information should be directed to DESE in writing to aedc@education.gov.au. There is also a range of information on the AEDC initiative available from the AEDC website www.aedc.gov.au.

The DESE website includes the following information:

- DESE privacy policy
- information on how DESE complies with the Australian Privacy Principles (APP)
- how complaints of a suspected breach of privacy can be made
- an outline of how DESE deals with complaints.

Does the child have to be present when the teacher completes the Australian version of the Instrument?

No. Teachers complete the Australian version of the Instrument using a secure data collection system. The questions are completed based on teachers' knowledge and observations of the children in their class. It is not a test and children are not required to be present while teachers complete the questions.

How reliable is teacher reporting?

Teacher reporting is very reliable. Teachers' professional expertise and knowledge of the children they teach means they are well-placed to make observations about children's development.

Studies in Canada have confirmed the reliability of teacher reporting by using different teachers to report on the same children.

Teachers are provided with a detailed guide and undertake one hour of training to help them use the Instrument accurately.

Teachers are highly skilled professionals with an understanding of early childhood development. This makes them well-placed to observe the development of children.

Will parents/carers get individual results for their child?

The AEDC is not like the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) where individual reports are provided to parents/carers. For the AEDC your child's data will be combined with data from the other children living within the same community. AEDC results for individual children are not reported and the AEDC is not used as an individual diagnostic tool. This means that an individual child report is not produced.

For further information about accessing your child's information please refer to the following website [Department of Education, Skills and Employment's Guide to Accessing and Correcting Your Personal Information.](#)

Has the AEDC been done before?

Between 2004 and 2008 AEDC was trialled in 60 communities across Australia. This involved 56,752 children, 2,157 teachers from 1,012 schools (both government and non-government) from every state and territory (with the exception of the Northern Territory).

In 2009, the AEDC (formerly known as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)) was conducted nationally for the first time, providing a snapshot of the early childhood development outcomes of children in Australia.

The AEDC has been conducted nationally every three years since then (2012, 2015, 2018). More than 95 per cent of schools with eligible children participated in each collection.

Why use a population measure?

A population measure places the focus on the population or groups. The AEDC examines early childhood development across the whole community. Moving the focus of effort from the individual child to all children in the community makes a bigger difference for more children.

The AEDC data can be used by communities, schools, policy makers, early childhood educators and health services, local councils and governments in conjunction with other resources (such as state and national statistics) to plan and evaluate efforts to support optimal early childhood development.

What are the benefits of AEDC?

Research shows that the experiences and relationships that babies and children have during the early years strongly affect their future development. Providing the right kinds of services, resources and support during the early years brings life-long benefits to children and the community.

Teachers in Australia reported that participating in the AEDC raised their awareness of the needs of individual children and the class as a whole. They also reported that completing the AEDC assisted their planning to support children's transition to school and planning of the classroom program.

Ongoing AEDC funds ensure governments and communities continue to have the information they need to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families. The partnerships that have already developed across education, health and community services can continue to grow and build on the work already commenced.

Results from previous data collections have been used to help young children and families in a range of ways:

- communities starting new playgrounds and parenting services
- schools seeing improved student performance through new literacy programmes
- governments using the data as evidence to develop better policies for children.

For examples of how AEDC results have been used by schools and communities, please refer to the [school stories](#) and [community stories](#) on the AEDC websites.