

# Primary School Overview



**NSI**  
Partnerships



## Primary School Services Overview

2020

Updated February 2020



Curtin University

© Copyright Dr Jill Aldridge 2017

**National School Improvement Partnerships**

[www.NSIPartnerships.com.au](http://www.NSIPartnerships.com.au)  
[NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au](mailto:NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au)



# WHAT NSI OFFERS

NSI offers a practical, evidence-based program for school improvement. Our work centres around aspects of the school and classroom environments, which have been shown to have important influences on a range of educational and psychosocial outcomes. Working with NSI helps school leaders and teachers to introduce cultural change that allows each student to achieve their best.

We offer:

- A structured, manageable, proven **school improvement process**
- **Research-validated online surveys** gathering the views of students, staff, and parents / caregivers
- **Customised feedback packages** presenting survey data in meaningful ways
- **Companion guides** supporting interpretation of the survey data and targeted improvement efforts
- A range of **professional learning** for teachers, teacher-leaders and principals
- Processes and materials that **align with Australian policy requirements** (the AITSL Professional Standards for teachers and principals and the reform directions specified in the Australian Education Act 2013).

More than 2000 teachers and over 90 schools have been involved with NSI, with some being involved for more than 10 years. These teachers and schools have experienced the power of NSI's surveys and school improvement process for generating sustainable change in school culture so that each student, teacher and leader can reach their potential.

In NSI schools, data use and improvement efforts are no longer fragmented or seen as “add-ons” to the core work of the school. Rather, evidence-based planning and decision-making become integral parts of the makeup of the school; teacher- and organisational-level efforts are coherent and interrelated; and the gains made are sustained over time.

Through working with NSI, teachers and school leaders also build their capacity in the areas of change management, inquiry / action research, coaching, data-driven decision making, professional collaboration, and self-evaluation.



# HOW NSI WORKS WITH SCHOOLS

NSI builds capacity in schools through a process-oriented approach that leads to sustainable change in school culture and improvement in a range of outcomes.

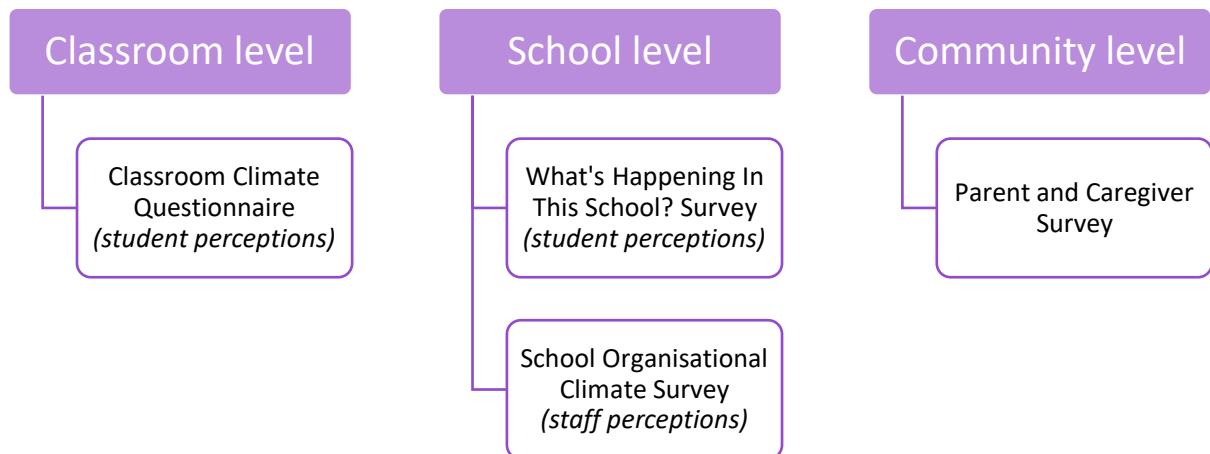
NSI differs from other providers in that we provide an implementation process in which schools learn in action. This makes the process more gradual, requiring less time commitment from teachers and administrators in an already time-poor environment, and builds teacher and leadership expertise from within the school environment.

Our work is driven by three major components: our surveys and the associated feedback, our professional development and resources, and our collaborative inquiry process.

## Our surveys

NSI's unique surveys assess students', teachers' and parents' actual (current) and preferred (ideal) perceptions of the school and classroom climate and track change over time. Unlike most surveys on the market, our surveys are built on an extensive programme of research and have strong, published evidence to support their validity and reliability. Key to the success of our surveys is the way they are integrated with professional learning and our structured improvement process.

We offer four surveys (shown below) that are relevant to primary schools. (For the student surveys, lower and upper primary school versions are available.) Schools can choose to use one, two, three, or all four of the surveys below; discounts are available for schools using multiple surveys. Further details about each survey are available on pages 6 to 9 of this booklet.



Our expert team works with school staff to administer the online surveys, and we then take care of the data analysis and provide detailed, ready-to-use feedback packages. We offer workshops and one-on-one coaching on interpreting and using the feedback to inform improvement efforts.

For all schools working with NSI, we also offer FREE access to two additional surveys (shown below) to help schools track the success of their efforts. See our [website](#) for more information about these.

Impact of teacher professional development questionnaire

Coaching effectiveness questionnaire

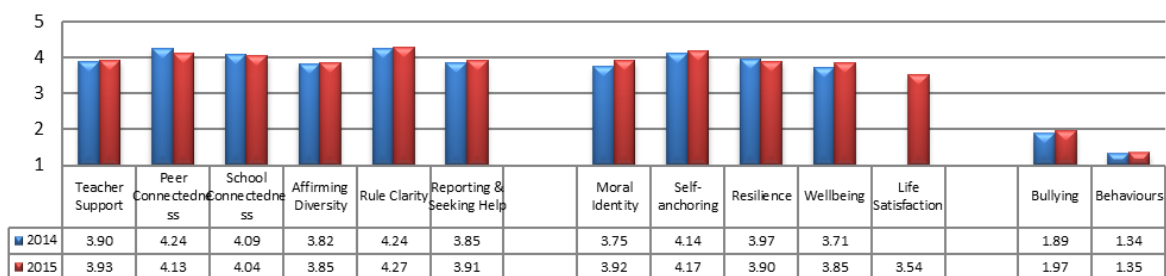


## Survey feedback packages

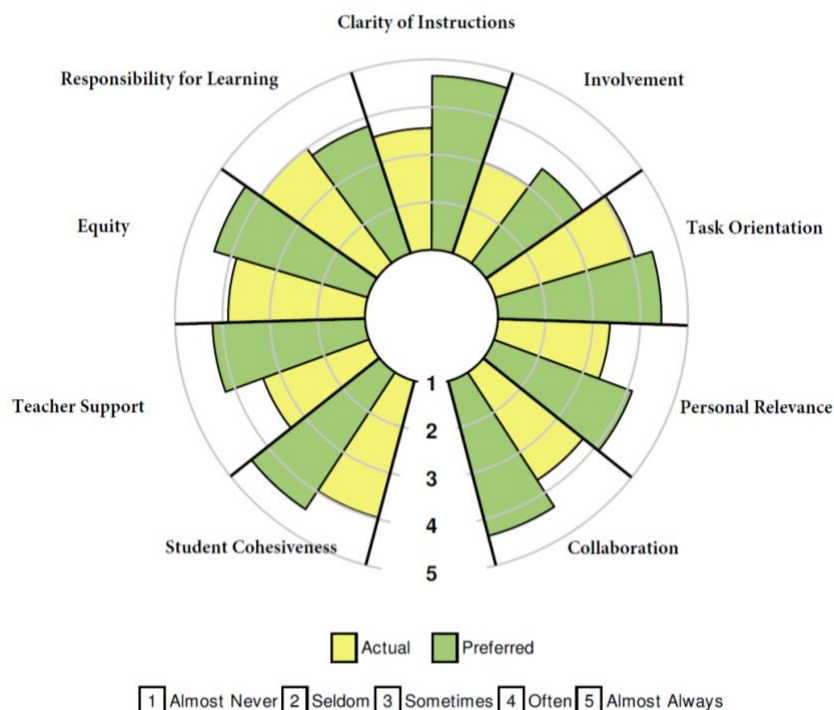
A strength of our work is the detailed feedback that we provide to schools and teachers. By taking care of the data analysis and providing ready-to-use graphs and summaries of information, we streamline the process of using data to inform improvement. Teachers and school leaders can then focus on interpreting the feedback, selecting target areas, and planning, implementing and evaluating strategies for improvement.

Below are some examples of the types of information included in our feedback packages. The feedback is accompanied by comprehensive companion guides that explain what each construct (aspect) involves and what a positive school or classroom environment would look like for each one. However, the interpretation of the data is highly contextualised. To make sense of the feedback, school staff examine it considering their particular classroom or school setting.

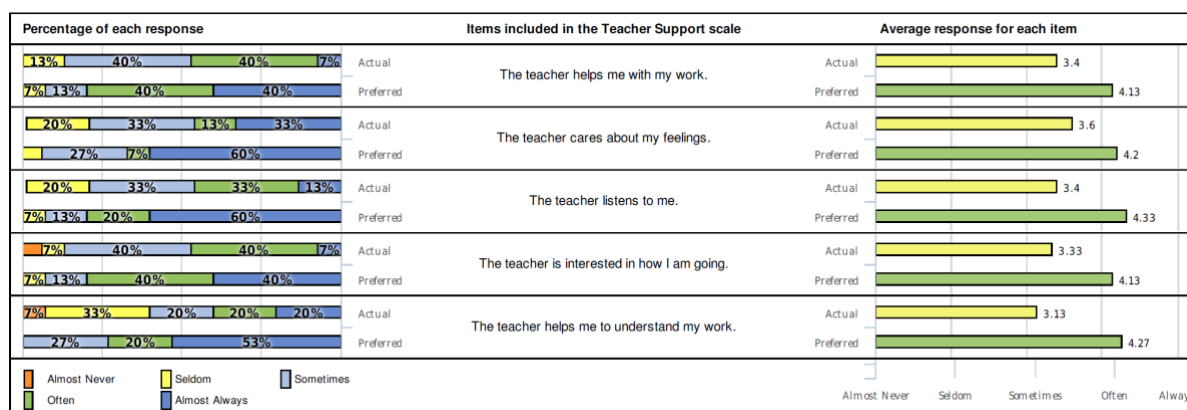
1. This graph is from the school-level *What's Happening In This School?* survey. It shows changes in the average scores over time for a range of important constructs (aspects) of the school climate.



2. This graphs is from the classroom-level *Classroom Climate Questionnaire*. It compares students' actual (current) and preferred (ideal) perceptions of key aspects of the classroom environment.

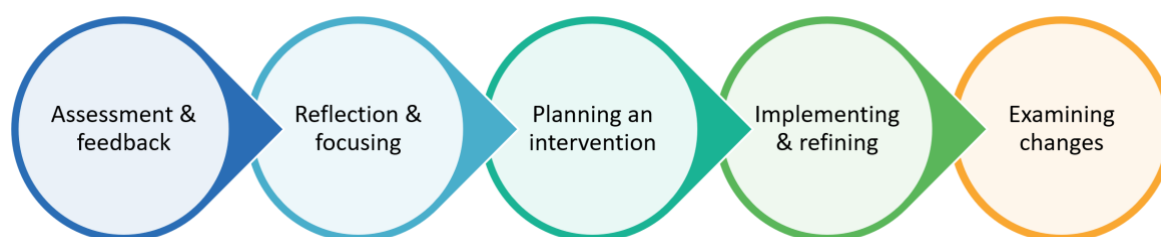


3. This graph is also from the Classroom Climate Questionnaire. It provides more detailed information about students' responses to the individual survey items making up a scale. For example, the five items shown below combine to produce the overall score for 'teacher support'.



### Our collaborative inquiry process for school improvement

NSI's work with schools centres on our five-step collaborative inquiry process. We use this award-winning, cost-effective process to guide improvement efforts and bring about sustained change. Continued engagement with this process supports the development of an improvement culture across the school.



We use our five-step collaborative inquiry process with **teachers** to examine and improve their classroom learning environments, and to track changes in the classroom climate and other student outcomes over time. Each teacher works on individualised goals based on feedback from their own students, but we encourage teachers to work in collaborative groups so that these efforts be shared, supported and evaluated through reflective conversations with colleagues.

We use the same five-step process with **principals, teachers and leadership teams** to examine and improve aspects of the school-wide climate, and to track changes in this climate and other student outcomes over time. We also support principals in developing an inquiry team within their school – a group of staff with whom the principal will work collaboratively to interpret the survey feedback and to plan, lead and evaluate improvement efforts. This builds capacity within the school and allows the principal to engage in pedagogical leadership – a powerful leadership style “in which the principal participates as a co-learner with teachers in moving learning and the school forward”<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Fullan, M.; in Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: NZ Ministry of Education. p. 1.



## Professional learning

NSI provides a range of forms of in-depth professional development to support and build the capacity of teachers and school leaders.

**Formal professional development sessions** offer time to learn new skills, consider new ideas, and reflect on practice. All of our formal professional development sessions are hands-on and are directly linked to supporting the collaborative inquiry process in the school. Topics include:

- Improving the classroom learning environment (for all staff; half day)
- Understanding, interpreting and using the survey feedback (for all staff; one hour)
- Leading professional learning groups (for principals and teacher-leaders; half day)
- Maximising the power of collaborative action research (for all staff; half day)
- Survey coordination (for teacher-leaders; one hour)
- Coaching skills (for principals and teacher-leaders; full day)
- Qualitative information to support whole-school data (one-hour data collection exercise facilitated by NSI staff at a whole-staff meeting, followed by consultation with school leaders about the findings)
- Understanding disabilities and their effects on students (for all staff; half day)
- Developing leadership capacity for school improvement (leadership team, 3 x full days over 9 months).

**Participating in the collaborative inquiry process** is a major source of professional learning for teachers and school leaders alike. Action research is known to be a powerful means for improving schools, empowering staff, increasing staff knowledge and skills, changing staff practice, and improving student outcomes<sup>2</sup>. Our approach to action learning is particularly effective because the data our surveys collect from key stakeholders in the school community (students, teachers, and parents / caregivers) prompts fresh reflection and re-evaluation of 'what is working' and what could be improved. Working in collaborative groups also brings fresh ideas, support, and accountability.

**In-school coaching** offers personalised support and guidance at all stages of the improvement process. Coaching for teachers can include classroom observation and feedback as well as support with interpreting survey feedback and formulating action plans. Coaching for principals and teacher-leaders focuses on building capacity in areas including data interpretation, action research and coaching so that these staff can lead others in the collaborative improvement process.

**Comprehensive teacher and principal companion booklets** provide theoretical background and practical guidance for the improvement process. These booklets contain overviews of each of the constructs (aspects) examined in each survey and examples of what positive environments look like. The booklets also provide practical guidance for interpreting and using survey feedback.



<sup>2</sup> Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding School Improvement with Action Research*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Selected chapters are freely available online at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/100047.aspx>



# OUR SURVEYS

The four surveys described below are all relevant for use in primary schools. Our surveys have been validated in research studies and successfully used in many schools. Please contact us via [NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au](mailto:NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au) for more information about the validation of the surveys.

## Classroom Climate Questionnaire

The Classroom Climate Questionnaire-Primary (CCQ-P) is a comprehensive online survey that can be used by primary school teachers to gain insights into how students perceive their learning environment and their active engagement in learning. Versions of the CCQ-P are available to suit upper primary school students (years 3-7) and lower primary school students (years 1-3).

The CCQ-P is administered twice a year (once as a pre-test and again as a post-test) to one class of students per teacher. This provides evidence related to the success of the improvement efforts. The table below shows the scales included in the CCQ. Each scale is measured by a group of questions.

Learning Environment Scales	
Scale	Assesses the extent to which ...
Student cohesiveness	... students feel accepted and supported by their classmates and safe to express their ideas.
Teacher support	... the teacher helps, befriends, trusts and is interested in students.
Equity*	... students are treated fairly by the teacher.
Responsibility for learning*	... students feel that they are given responsibility for their own learning.
Clarity of instructions	... students are provided with clear information about the criteria about what they need to do and how they can do it well.
Involvement	... students have attentive interest, participate in discussions, ask questions and share ideas.
Task orientation	... it is important to complete activities planned and to stay on the subject matter.
Personal relevance*	... the subject is relevant to students' everyday out-of-school experiences.
Collaboration	... students collaborate with one another on learning tasks.
Student Motivation and Engagement Scales	
Scale	Assesses the extent to which ...
Self-efficacy	... the student is confident and believes in his/her own ability in successfully performing learning tasks.
Learning goal orientation	... the student participates in class for the purpose of learning, understanding and mastering concepts as well as improving skills
Self-regulation	... the student controls and regulates his/her efforts in learning tasks.
Enjoyment of class and school	... students are interested in, enjoy and look forward to coming to class and school

\* Scale not included in the lower primary version.

## What's Happening In This School? Survey

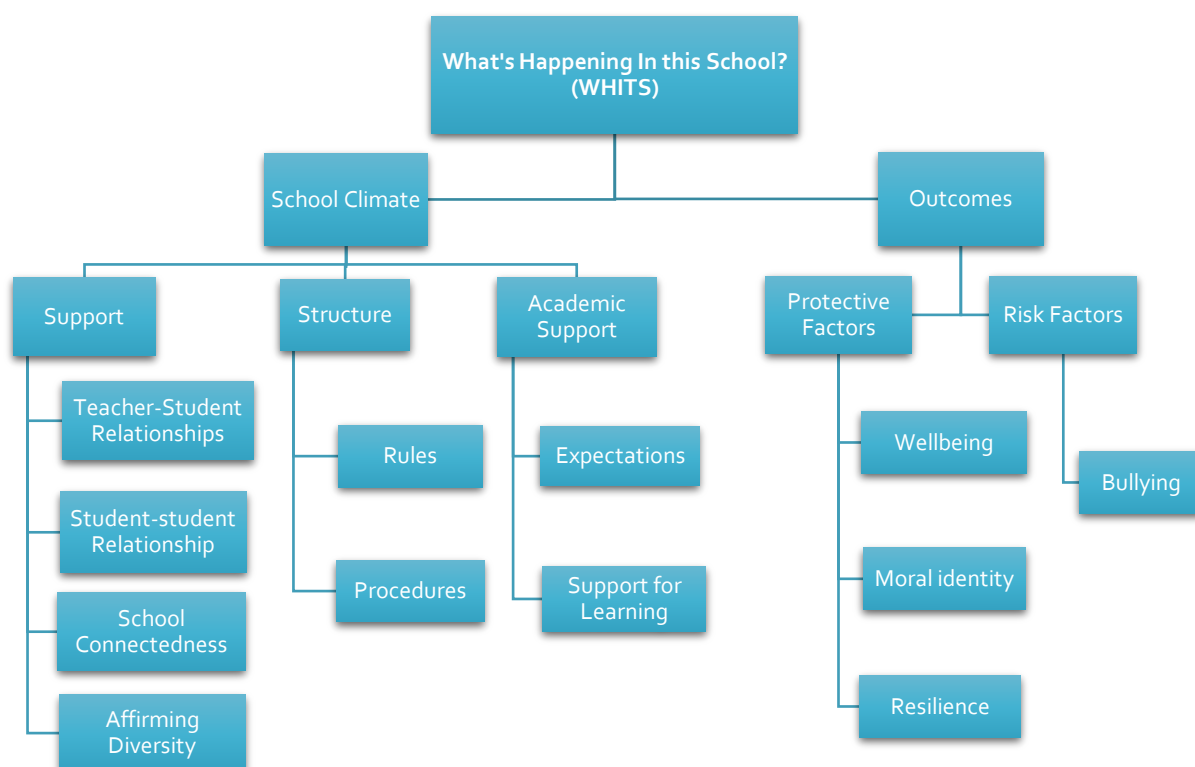




A positive school climate is integral to students' academic, emotional and behavioural success at school. The What's Happening In This School? (WHITS) survey has been developed to assess key aspects of the school culture: the socio-emotional school climate as well as protective and risk factors within the school environment.

The WHITS survey (online) is administered annually, either to all students or to a representative sample of students. The table below shows the scales included in the primary school version of the WHITS. Each scale is measured by a group of questions.

We have lower primary and upper primary school versions of the WHITS. The lower primary school version is shorter and uses emoji-style faces for students to indicate their responses to each item.



School Climate Scales	
<b>Relationship Support</b>	<i>Assesses the extent to which ...</i>
Teacher support	... students perceive that teachers at the school are supportive and helpful.
Peer connectedness	... students feel that there is contact and friendship between students regardless of culture and background.
School connectedness	... students perceive themselves to be part of a community.
Affirming diversity*	... students with differing cultural backgrounds and experiences are acknowledged and valued.
<b>Structure</b>	<i>Assesses the extent to which ...</i>
Clear Expectations	... students perceive the expectations of the school to be clear and promote a safe environment.
Reporting and seeking help	... students are aware of procedures to, and are confident that they can, report incidents.
<b>Academic Support</b>	<i>Assesses the extent to which ...</i>
Support for Learning	... students feel that the actions of the teachers at the school support their learning.
Expectations for Success	... students feel that their teachers expect them to succeed and challenge them to learn.
Protective Factor Scales	
<b>Scale</b>	<i>Assesses the extent to which ...</i>
Moral identity (agency)	... students have a commitment to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others.
Resilience	... students are able to cope with adversity and stress and achieve goals in the face of obstacles.
Wellbeing	... students experience life in a positive way.
Risk Factor Scales	
<b>Scale</b>	<i>Assesses the extent to which ...</i>
Bullying	... students have experienced bullying over the past two weeks.
Risky behaviour	...students consider themselves to be involved in risky or undesirable behaviour.
Disruptive Behaviour	... students perceive lessons to be disrupted by others.

\*Scale not included in the lower primary version.



## School Organisational Climate Survey

The School Organisational Climate Survey (SOCS) examines staff perceptions of aspects of the school climate that are key to developing a learning organisation. We have three versions of the SOCS, one each for: teachers, education support, and general staff.

The SOCS can be used by school leaders to examine staff perceptions of their schools' organisational climate. This information can then be used to inform and guide improvement efforts. It is administered annually.

The aspects included in the SOCS have been found to influence a range of outcomes for both students (for example, student self-concept; social-emotional learning; lower levels of absenteeism; personal attitudes; and academic achievement) and staff (for example, job satisfaction; occupational stress; morale; and commitment to the organisation). The table below shows the scales included in the SOCS. Each scale is measured by a group of questions.

School Organisational Climate Scales	
Scale	Assesses the extent to which ...
Clear school mission	... teachers understand, agree with and are committed to the mission and goals of the school.
Participating in decision making	... the principal and school leadership team involve staff members when making decisions.
Providing individual support	... the principal respects the staff and is concerned about their personal feelings and needs.
Encouraging improvement of practice	... teachers are encouraged to improve and refine their practice.
Staff collegiality	... teachers work and learn together and obtain assistance, advice and encouragement from their colleagues.
Safe and orderly environment	... the policies and rules in place help to create and maintain a safe and orderly environment.
Home-school relations	... the relationships between parents and the teachers and school are positive.
Parent Involvement*	... parents engage with their child's education and whether the teachers actively seek to involve them in their child's education.
Expectations for success*	... the teachers and principal have high expectations for the success of the students.
Staff Wellbeing Scales	
Scale	Assesses the extent to which ...
Overall wellbeing	... teachers are in a healthy, comfortable state.
Job satisfaction	... teachers find working at the school satisfying and enjoyable.
Teacher self-efficacy*	... teachers rate their ability to teach well, particularly in difficult or trying situations.
Staff self-efficacy**	... staff rate their ability to do their job well, particularly in difficult or trying situations.

\*Scales included only in the teaching staff version.

\*\* Scale included in the teaching staff version and asked only of educational assistants in the support staff survey.



## Parent and Caregiver Survey

Effective parent and caregiver involvement can play a critical role in students' academic success – a growing body of research that indicates that parental engagement in schooling supports children's learning and leads to better learning outcomes. Our Parent and Caregiver Survey (PaCS) provides feedback to principals and school leadership teams about a wide range of dimensions important to parents. This helps school leaders to consider how they can foster greater involvement of parents, as key stakeholders, in the life of the school.

The PaCS is administered annually, either to all parents or to a representative sample. The table below shows the scales included in the PaCS. Each scale is measured by a group of questions.

Children's Experiences Scales	
Scale	Assesses the extent to which ...
Teacher support	... parents or caregivers feel that teachers at the school are supportive of students.
Student behaviour	... parents or caregivers feel that the school makes the expectations for behaviour clear and promotes a safe environment.
Stimulating and Challenging Environment	... parents or caregivers feel that the teachers at the school provide a stimulating and challenging environment for their child.
Parents' and Caregivers' Experiences Scales	
Welcoming school	... parents or caregivers feel welcomed by school staff.
Affirming diversity	... parents or caregivers feel that the backgrounds of families and social issues are acknowledged and valued.
Communication	... parents or caregivers feel that they are able to communicate with members of the school staff.
Assessment and Feedback	... parents or caregivers are aware of their child's progress and how their child's work is being judged.
Parents' and Caregivers' Attitudes Scales	
Aspirations for child's education	... parents or caregivers have high aspirations for their child's education.
Satisfaction with child's progress	... parents or caregivers are satisfied with their child's progress.
Satisfaction with the school	... parents or caregivers are satisfied with what the school does for their child.



## CONTACT

[www.NSIPartnerships.com.au](http://www.NSIPartnerships.com.au)

[NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au](mailto:NSITeam@NSIPartnerships.com.au)

## ABOUT NSI

National School Improvement Partnerships (NSI) is an initiative out of Curtin University, Western Australia. NSI's work has developed out of many years of research on improving the performance of primary and secondary schools in Australia, at the classroom and whole-school level. In 2017, NSI received Curtin University's 'Curtinnovation' award for innovation in education, acknowledging our excellence in turning research findings into practical services for schools.

NSI has been led by Associate Professor Jill Aldridge since 2001. Jill is an international leader in the field of learning environments research and has published extensively in this field. She has also worked closely with large numbers of Australian schools, principals and teachers, and has a deep understanding of their needs within the practical school context.



© National School Improvement Partnerships 2017