



mirrung
IMPACT REPORT
2024

About this report

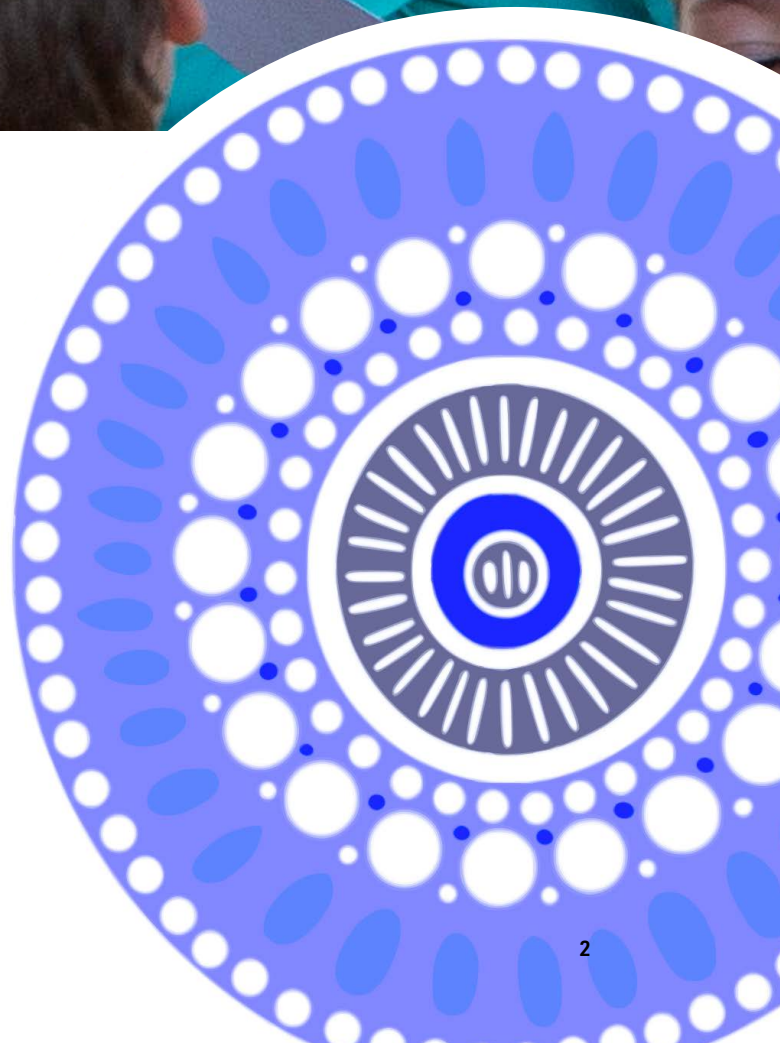
This report was commissioned by NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) to evaluate the impacts of the School Gateway Project, Mirrung initiative at Ashcroft Public School. The report was prepared by Social Outcomes, one of Australia's leading impact organisations.

NCOSS acknowledges that the NCOSS School Gateway Project would not have been possible without the generous funding and support of Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropies. The commitment of the employees of Allan Gray and Orbis Australia to "inclusive and equitable education" has enabled Mirrung to support equity in access to education, health and development support services for the children and families of Ashcroft, NSW Australia.



Acknowledgement of Country

NCOSS acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Australia and their continuing connection to both their lands and seas. We also pay our respects to Elders—past and present—and generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples now and into the future. We acknowledge the spirit of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and accept the invitation to walk with First Nations peoples in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.



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1 Executive summary

Introduction

Just genuinely, Ashcroft is just a really great place where children just can have fun, learn and be the best version of themselves.

(Ashcroft student)

[The] main priorities with Mirrung are all intertwined with what we do in a classroom. For example, improved attendance. We can't teach them if they're not there. Wellbeing in terms of food and all that. A child can't learn if they're hungry. Or if they haven't got clothes. Or even a home to go home to. So, the fact that Mirrung help in all those fundamental needs, that's what gets them to school and that's what helps us do our job.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Mirrung at Ashcroft Public School is an innovative, place-based initiative that support's the education, health and development of all children and their families within the school setting. This holistic, integrated model empowers staff to focus on education and learning excellence. Mirrung's vision is that **all children can reach their learning potential regardless of where they live, their cultural background or their socioeconomic status**. Mirrung, which means 'belonging' in the Dharug language, was launched in Public Education Week, August 2022.

Ashcroft Public School is home to a strong, resilient and diverse community, which is also one of the most disadvantaged in New South Wales. Forty percent of children in Ashcroft live below the poverty line.¹

The Mirrung model was developed to address some of the challenges faced by children and families living in communities that experience significant concentrated disadvantage, including challenges in accessing the supports that they need to thrive. Those children and families experience a service system that:

- is complex, fragmented, hard to navigate and therefore, hard to access
- takes a program approach that assumes people will make sense of what is on offer and navigate from service to service to achieve what they need
- has rigid eligibility criteria that does not respond to the often multiple and overlapping challenges people face.

Mirrung utilises the school as a universal 'soft-entry' gateway to respond flexibly to the priorities and needs of the community. It takes a whole-of-family approach, that via a dedicated team, facilitates the provision of a comprehensive range of child and family supports and services, and provides service coordination between students, families and local health and social service organisations.

This second report on Mirrung's impact sets out progress and achievements over 2024. It tells the story of a flourishing school community where families feel heard and supported, and children want to go to school.

The 2024 data suggests that in just two years, Mirrung has supported substantial and positive impacts for Ashcroft Public School students, their families and the school community – particularly in the area of student and family wellbeing. Attendance and academic performance has shown some significant improvements but remain behind the state average reflecting the long-term challenges faced by students in the Ashcroft community.

¹ NCOSS, [Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW](#), April 2023.



Mirrung's impact

School attendance has significantly increased

[H]aving that sense of belonging makes [the children] more inclined to come to school. If they want to be at school, if they feel safe at school, if they know that they're cared for, they have a voice, they matter, then that also reflects in their academic performance.

(Ashcroft leadership)

Ashcroft Public School measures success in attendance by the number of students who attend school 90% or more of the time. Attendance at the school has markedly increased over the last three years.

64% of students attended school 90% or more of the time in 2024

This is an 11 percentage point improvement on 2023 (52%) and 23 percentage points higher than 2022 (41%)

Student performance has improved

The parents trust the school a lot. And they know that the children will learn more as well.

(Ashcroft student)

In 2023-2024, Ashcroft Public School measured academic growth internally through annual progress measures in literacy (comprehension across the whole school and phonics in the early years) and numeracy (number and place value). The 2024 results show improvement. Interviews and focus groups also reveal that students are more engaged in class and ready to learn.

36% of students are achieving stage appropriate outcomes in comprehension, which is 6.5 percentage points higher than in 2023 (29.5%)

28% of students are achieving stage appropriate outcomes in number and place value, which is 10 percentage points higher than in 2023 (18%)

30.5% of Year 1 students are achieving appropriate outcomes in the Phonics Screening Check, which is 4.5 percentage points higher than in 2023 (26%)

Student and family wellbeing is high and growing

I take pride ... because we include support for anyone that needs it ... We provide everything that a child would need at a school and they're allowed to have their rights.

(Ashcroft student)

My husband was away for four months and this school helped us. I can't thank this school enough for so many good things that they did for my family ... My kids are safe here.

(Ashcroft parent)

Ashcroft Public School measures student and family wellbeing through the NSW-wide Tell Them From Me survey and from surveys of teachers, families and students about Mirrung. The surveys show that a high percentage of students, parents/carers and teachers feel a sense of belonging at the school, that the school climate is safe and that Mirrung is having a positive impact. Interviews and focus groups also reveal that support in the form of food, clothing and facilitated access to health care and social services is having a significant and positive impact for students and families.

While behaviour data was not included in the 2024 evaluation of Mirrung – it is significant to note that suspensions and serious behaviour incidents at the school have decreased by more than half since Mirrung commenced with focus on the health and wellbeing of students.

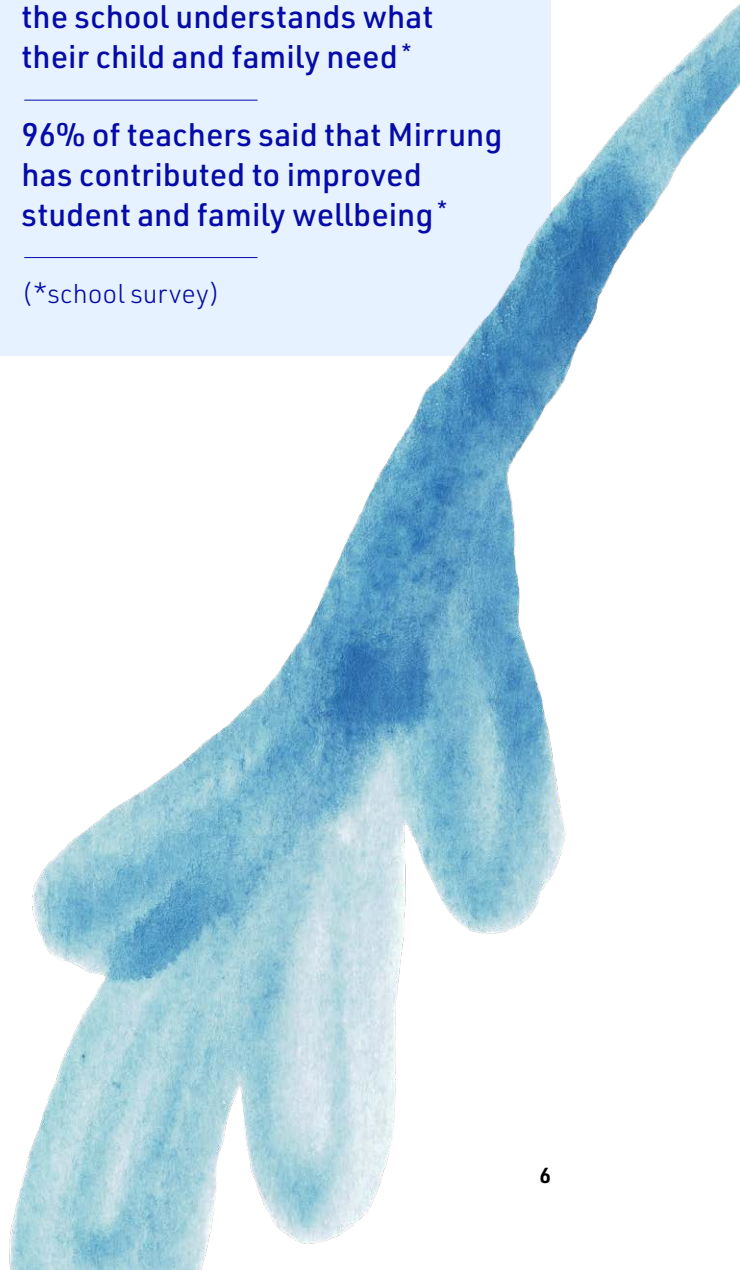
89% of students said they felt a positive sense of belonging (this is 8 percentage points higher than 2023 and 20 percentage points higher than the NSW state school average)

83% of students said that they feel that they and their family can get help at school if they need it*

93% of parents/carers said that the school understands what their child and family need*

96% of teachers said that Mirrung has contributed to improved student and family wellbeing*

(*school survey)



Mirrung activities by number 2024



1

Mirrung paediatrician



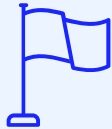
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student patients of the Mirrung paediatrician



73

early years students screened for developmental vulnerability and 51 (70%) flagged for interventions



172

students referred to Mirrung through Learning & Support processes



510

enrolments in 23 different Afterschool Clubs



48

children accessed NDIS-funded services at school



83

parent attendances at adult education programs



201

students received free dental screening and eye checks



6

parents trained to volunteer in classrooms



Distributed over

800

frozen meals and over 100 food hampers

2 About Mirrung

Mirrung has created a safe space for students, parents and staff to feel supported and have given families access to services and care when they need.

(Ashcroft teacher)

It's just the way everyone operates. So, it's the principles of Mirrung, principles like: 'no wrong door' and 'tell your story once' and 'soft entry' and 'positive, proactive supports'. All the principles have really filtered through the school.

(Ashcroft leadership)

Mirrung takes a holistic approach at Ashcroft Public School that supports the education and wellbeing of students through an integrated whole-of-family model that is non-judgemental, positive and culturally safe. Mirrung was launched in 2022 as a partnership between the New South Wales Council of Social Service (NCOSS) and Ashcroft Public School, supported by the NSW Department of Education and with philanthropic funding.

Mirrung's vision is that:

Students of Ashcroft Public School can achieve their learning potential regardless of where they live, their cultural and/or their linguistic background and socioeconomic status.

The Mirrung model includes the following pillars:

- a focus on early learning
- student enrichment and engagement
- support for student and family health and wellbeing
- family engagement.

The longer-term intended impacts of the Mirrung approach for Ashcroft Public School students are improved attendance; academic growth and improved wellbeing.



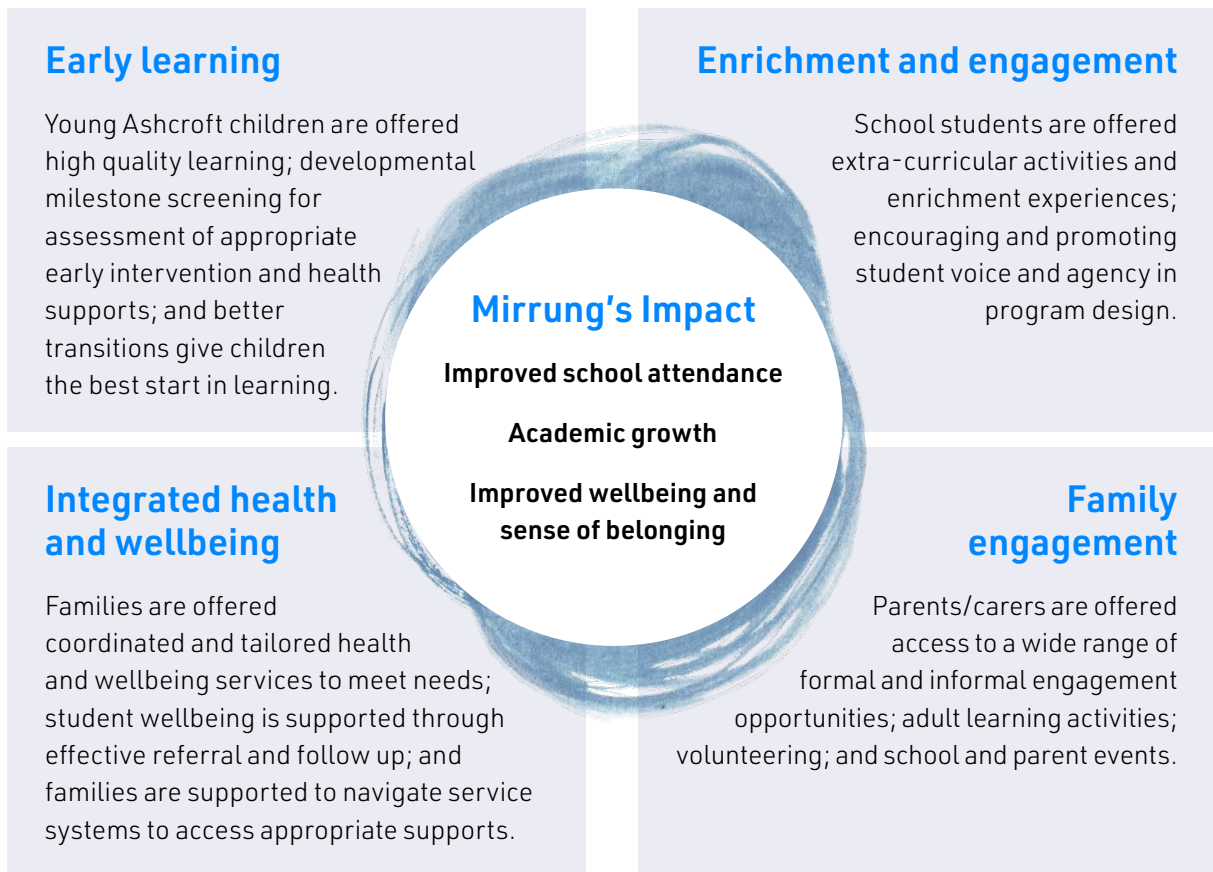


Figure 1 The Mirrung Model

2.1 Who are the children and families of Ashcroft Public School?

Ashcroft Public School is a primary school with 320 students, including 40 Preschoolers. There is an onsite Schools as Community Centre called the Beehive which runs playgroups that engage up to 40 children each week.

While Ashcroft is a community of considerable strength and resilience, it is also a community that experiences significant disadvantage. In 2024, Ashcroft Public School was in the lowest 10% of schools in Australia in terms of the

social, economic and educational advantage experienced by the attending children and families.² A total of 91% of Ashcroft students fall into the bottom half of student socio-educational disadvantage, 68% in the most disadvantaged quartile.³

Seventy-two per cent of children attending Ashcroft Public School have a language background other than English and 12% are Indigenous.⁴

2 Ashcroft Public School has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage of 898. My School, accessed 17 October 2024.

3 NSW Government, [My School](#), accessed 4 November 2024.

4 NSW Government, [My School](#), accessed 4 November 2024.

2.2 Why was Mirrung established?

If it wasn't for their help, we'd be pretty much homeless with the kids. ... They are helping us with housing appointments, just helping to push us in the right direction. ... Honestly, without their help we'd be out on the streets.

(Ashcroft parent)

We've got a good connection with housing at the moment. We know who to call and we know who to call if we need more food for those little connections and that kind of web of services and the availability, we've all improved I guess in our capacity to access.

(Ashcroft leadership)

Mirrung was established to take a holistic approach to the needs of the students of Ashcroft Public School. The programs aim is to address the key challenges faced by children and families in communities that experience significant and concentrated disadvantage; including challenges in accessing the services that they need. Mirrung has not involved the establishment, funding and delivery of new programs – it aims to influence the existing service system to serve the community better.

One of the key predictors of educational outcomes is a child's postcode.⁵ Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter school with developmental vulnerabilities, have lower school attendance, poorer school achievement and leave school early.⁶ And these same children are more likely to experience unemployment, poor mental and physical health, homelessness and interactions with the (legal) justice system when they are adults.⁷

Children and families from communities experiencing disadvantage often experience significant barriers to accessing the services that they need. They experience the service system as complex, fragmented and hard to access. The service system often does not provide children and families with the services that they need, nor are those services delivered in a way that works for them. Services often fail to take a client-centred or culturally safe approach; have strict eligibility criteria; are delivered in inaccessible locations; have inappropriate service delivery hours; or are just not available.

School-based wellbeing hubs are an evidence-based response to this experience of the service system in communities that have deep and concentrated disadvantage.

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- 5 Lamb S, Huo S, Walstab A, Wade A, Maire Q, Doecke E, Jackson J and Endekov Z, [Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out](#), Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne, 2020; Tanton R, Dare L, Miranti R, Vidyattama Y, Yule A and McCabe, M, [Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia](#), Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne, 2021.
- 6 See for example Pascoe S, Brennan D, [Lifting Our Game](#), 2017; Lamb S et al, [Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out](#), 2020; Deloitte Access Economics, [Exploring need and funding models for a national approach to integrated child and family centres](#), May 2023
- 7 See for example, Lamb S et al, [Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out](#), 2020; The Smith Family, [Pathways, Engagement and Transitions: Experiences of early school leavers](#), 2024.

Michelle (not her real name) has two children, one of whom attends Ashcroft Public School and the other, the playgroup. She reached out to Mirrung to ask for assistance with her impending homelessness. Michelle has lived in Ashcroft for most of her life and was struggling to advocate for herself and her family with Homes NSW. The situation was impacting on her mental health and as a result she was struggling to get her children to school. Mirrung arranged meetings with Homes NSW on her behalf and attended these meetings with her. Mirrung connected Michelle with the Department of Communities and Justice-funded family counsellor who operates out of the school one day per week. Michelle's son has had excellent attendance since we became engaged with the family (above 90%). With support from Mirrung, the younger child has begun receiving speech therapy to assist with developmental delays. Michelle hopes that she can stay in Ashcroft so that her children can continue their schooling at Ashcroft Public School.

Michelle said:

'The school have been really amazing, they have gone the extra mile to help a family in need.'



2.3 How does Mirrung achieve impact?

The school is moving towards an approach which values supporting families as a whole, not just school-aged children. This includes increased knowledge and awareness of external services and how to access them.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Students are not only supported, it's now a 'family' approach. Parents/carers now have a place where they belong and that then benefits the overall family dynamic.

(Ashcroft teacher)

A school-wide approach, Mirrung focusses on building trust with families and providing integrated, targeted supports for students so that they can experience positive academic growth and improved student and family wellbeing. Importantly, Mirrung is a community-led solution, which listens to Ashcroft children and families about what they need and what services will make a difference.

To achieve impact, Mirrung:

- takes a **place-based approach** that utilises the school as a gateway for the delivery of integrated services
- takes a **family-centred approach**, understanding that student wellbeing and learning will improve if families are also supported
- facilitates the provision of a **diverse range of child and family supports**
- provides an internal **referral pathway** for all school staff and **facilitates service coordination** – taking on a 'service navigation' role
- builds **relationships and partnerships** with local health and social service organisations.

NCOSS supports the delivery of the Mirrung approach in two key ways. First, by linking up the education, health and social service sectors so that students and families at the school can access integrated supports that meet their needs. Second, by ensuring that the Mirrung approach continues to be informed by evidence – including the collection of the impact data included in this report. This function, which is often known in place-based models as a 'backbone' role, or 'the glue', is independently funded through philanthropy.

Ashcroft Public School has a history of concern for Hassan (not his real name) who is in Year 3. The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has been involved but reports made have never reached the ROSH threshold. Engagement with the family has been inconsistent, difficult and characterised by a lack of trust. This year, Mirrung contacted Hassan's mum to arrange a meeting about significant behaviour escalation. After initial hesitation, she relayed the family's situation that included extreme financial hardship and the impacts this was having on her mental health and subsequently on family dynamics. Mirrung referred mum to a DCJ-funded social service organisation for general case support. She has started receiving financial and psychological counselling. Hassan has been included in a sports-driven school-based social support group and additionally, has started receiving psychological counselling through a DCJ-funded service. The school has not made a mandatory report on the family this year.

2.4 About this evaluation

This evaluation of Mirrung's impact was conducted in October 2024. It involved assessing how Mirrung has contributed to change for the children and families of Ashcroft Public School as defined in its theory of change.

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, including:

- school data regarding attendance, academic growth and the execution of Mirrung activities
- survey data, including from:
 - the Department of Education Tell Them From Me survey
 - bespoke surveys of students, parents/ carers and students about their experience of Mirrung

- focus groups with:
 - parents/carers, including a First Nations group, an Arabic speaking group and a general group
 - teachers and support staff
 - students from the School Representative Council
- interviews with school and Department of Education leaders.

All focus groups and interviews were recorded with participant permission, enabling the inclusion of verbatim quotes throughout this report.

3 Mirrung's impact for children and families

The primary measures of Mirrung's impact for children and families are:

- improved school attendance
- academic growth
- improved wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Together, these measures demonstrate the extent to which Ashcroft Public School students are achieving their learning potential.



3.1 Attendance: students are coming to school more often

The kids just feel happy and safe, and they want to come to school every day for the different activities and to see their friends.

(Ashcroft parent)

As an important contributor to a student’s academic achievement, improved attendance is an outcome being tracked in the Plan for NSW Public Education and a key success measure for Mirrung.

Since Mirrung was launched in 2022, attendance at the school has improved. As shown in Figure 2 below, in 2022, the average attendance rate at Ashcroft was 84.5%. Two years later, the average attendance has grown to 88.4%.

Ashcroft Public School 2024 Average Attendance

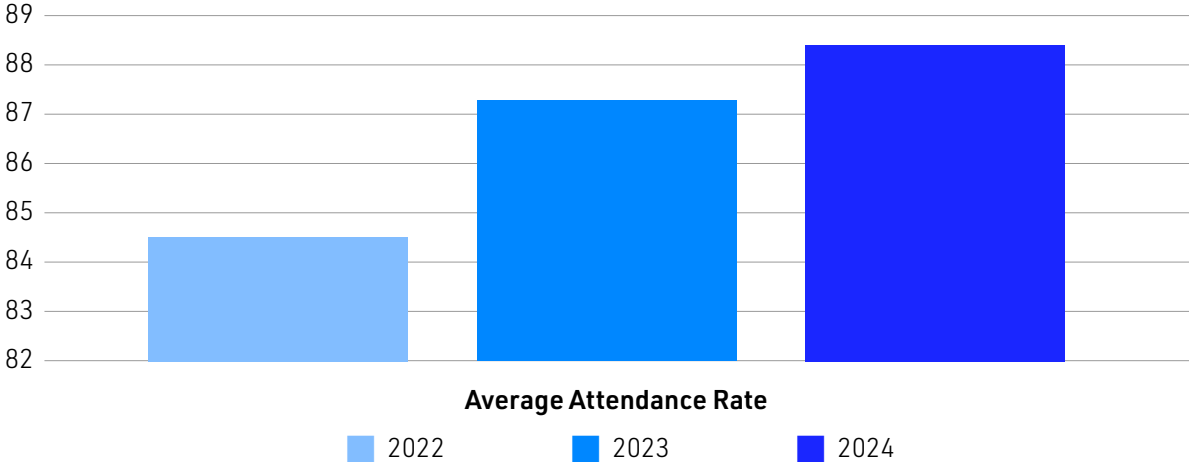


Figure 2 Ashcroft attendance rate



More significantly, Figure 3 shows that in 2024, the percentage of students attending school 90% or more of the time has grown by almost 23% since 2022.

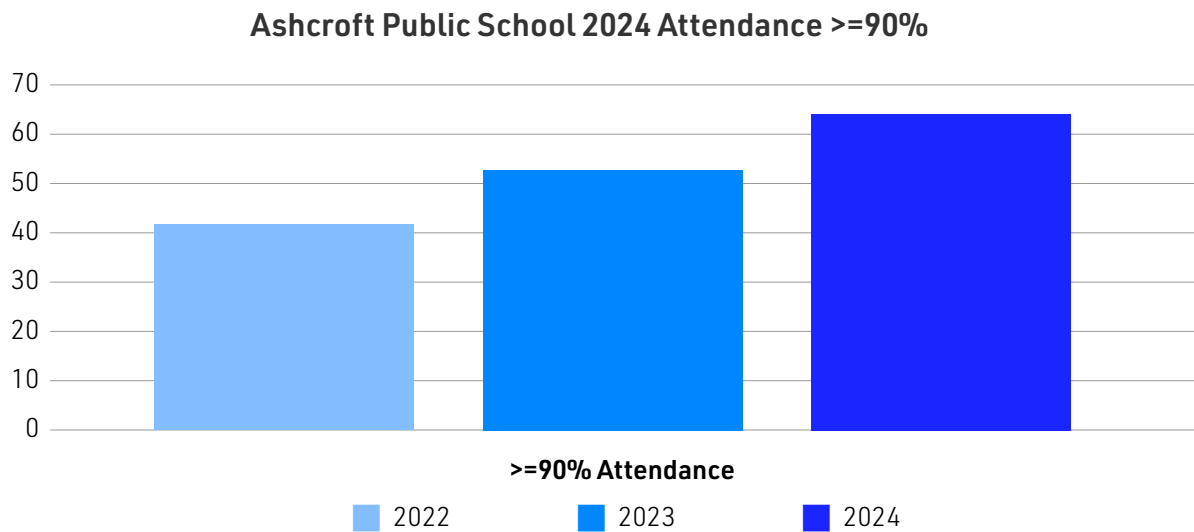


Figure 3 Ashcroft children attending more than 90% of the time

Parents attributed improved attendance to the sense of security and the fun that children have at school:

My son is in Year 6 and he wants to come to school all the time. Now he knows he has one term left, he wants to come every day. He doesn't want to go to high school.

(Ashcroft parent)

My son cried every day before he came to this school, but now he wants to come every day because there are so many fun activities for him.

(Ashcroft parent)



3.2 Academic growth: student performance is improving

The parents trust the school a lot. And they know that the children will learn more as well.

(Ashcroft student)

In 2023 and 2024, Ashcroft Public School measured academic growth internally by looking at progress in comprehension, and number and place value. The 2024 data shows that Ashcroft students achieved significant growth but there is still room for improvement, reflecting the myriad challenges faced by students in the Ashcroft community.

The following proportion of students were achieving stage appropriate outcomes in each year:

| Literacy and Numeracy Progressions | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | 2023 | 2024 |
| Comprehension: Understanding Texts | 29.5% | 36% |
| Number and Place Value | 18% | 28% |
| Phonics Screening Check (Year 1) | 26% | 30.5% |

Significantly, in a parent survey conducted for this evaluation, 91% of parents and carers said that they believed their child is supported in the classroom to work to their potential.⁸ And in a teacher survey, 93% of teachers said that Mirrung has contributed to a positive learning environment at Ashcroft Public School.⁹

School leaders believe that the wellbeing support provided through Mirrung has a direct impact on student’s capacity to learn:

Because the children have a roof over their heads or they have food ... the needs of their mum or dad ... are taken care of; [we are seeing the impact] in the classroom, whether it’s attendance or whether it’s concentration by the child ...

(Ashcroft leadership)

Parents and carers suggested that their children are more focussed at school because they know that the school cares about them – not just the children but the whole family:

[The support] makes them want to learn. They’re a lot more focused because they know that they’ve got no stress either because ... they know that [the support is] there to cover anything that needs to be covered.

(Ashcroft parent)

8 September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (68% strongly agree, 23% agree).

9 September 2024 Staff Survey (44% strongly agree, 48% agree).

3.3 Wellbeing: student and family wellbeing is improving

Basically, Ashcroft makes you feel like they care about your kids, and you as well as a parent, and a lot of schools don't at all.

(Ashcroft parent)

Your kids feel safe, the parents feel safe. Everyone talks to everybody. Everyone knows everybody.

(Ashcroft parent)

Mirrung provides families with a sense of belonging, a safe place to be.

(Ashcroft staff)

Wellbeing and learning are inextricably linked, research shows that effective, evidence-based wellbeing initiatives and strategies enhance student learning. Success measures at Mirrung include an increase in the proportion of students reporting a sense of belonging and that staff feel confident to proactively support student health and wellbeing.

Ashcroft Public School students have consistently reported a strong sense of belonging through the annual Tell Them From Me survey results. Significantly, in 2024, the Ashcroft results were more than 20% higher than the NSW Government School average.

| Students with a positive sense of belonging | | |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| | Ashcroft Public School | NSW Government Schools |
| 2024 | 89% | 69% |
| 2023 | 81% | 81% |
| 2022 | 88% | 81% |

The Mirrung-specific student and parent/carer surveys also show that students feel that they belong and are safe at Ashcroft Public School:

- 90% of students said that they are proud to belong to Ashcroft Public School¹⁰
- 87% of students said that they feel safe at Ashcroft Public School¹¹
- 95% of parents/carers reported that their child feels that they belong at school¹²
- 92% of parents/carers reported that their child feels safe at school.¹³

This survey data also shows that students, parents and carers, and staff all feel that Mirrung is contributing to student and family wellbeing:

- 83% of students said that they feel that they and their family can get help at school if they need it
- 93% of parents/carers said that the school understands what their child and family need
- 96% of teachers said that Mirrung has contributed to improved student and family wellbeing
- 89% of teachers said that they feel more confident to proactively support student health and wellbeing.

¹⁰ September 2024 Student Survey.

¹¹ September 2024 Student Survey.

¹² September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (66% strongly agree, 29% agree).

¹³ September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (66% strongly agree, 26% agree).

Students, parents and carers spoke repeatedly about the sense of safety and support that they experience at Ashcroft. They spoke about the understanding and kindness they experienced, the sense of community that has been built and how welcome they feel when they walk in the gates.¹⁴

Mirrung means helping ... Mirrung is a place in our school where all of the parents in our communities and Ashcroft students, they get together to host events and do activities ... It's a safe space.

(Ashcroft student)

Parents know that their children are safe in the school, and they know that they feel like they belong.

(Ashcroft student)

This school feels like a home.

(Ashcroft parent)

I've been able to talk to heaps of parents. It's just a welcoming community.

(Ashcroft parent)

Parents also talked about how the support provided to parents inside school has had the effect of building a community and sense of safety outside of school.¹⁵

Kids feel safer at school and they feel safer outside school.

(Ashcroft parent)

We have surrogate dads and mums that watch out for everybody's kids. The kids feel safe and the parents feel safe. Everybody knows everybody.

(Ashcroft parent)

Parents emphasised and appreciated the role that the school leadership plays in fostering the culture of care in the school.¹⁶



14 Arabic speaking parent focus group, 9 September 2024.

15 First Nations parent focus group, 9 September 2024.

16 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.

4 Mirrung's pillars of change

The Mirrung model has four areas through which it works to support positive outcomes for students and families.



Outcomes in each of these areas contribute to the overall goals of improved attendance, academic growth and improved wellbeing.

4.1 Early learning outcomes

Ensuring that children can access excellent early learning is a key element of the Mirrung approach. Mirrung aims to support these early learning outcomes:

- more Ashcroft children access early years education
- children in early years education access support to meet their developmental milestones
- children transition well from early learning to Kindergarten.

Giving children the best start in learning is also a key focus area of the Plan for NSW Public Education, with a commitment to increase enrolment and participation in preschool for all children and create better transitions between early education and primary school.

In 2024, 66% of students attending the Preschool at Ashcroft Public School will transition to Kindergarten in the school. Ashcroft Public School parents with children who had attended the onsite Preschool and Kindergarten commented that the fact that their children were familiar with the school grounds, had already been involved in school events and activities and had met the Kindergarten teachers has made a big difference to their transition.

I didn't think that my son would make it through school at all but there was so much support in the transition that he likes coming to school now.

(Ashcroft parent)

My son was in the Preschool before he came to Kindy. So, he was familiar with the school, with the staff in the school as well and that's helped him as well in the Preschool. They help a lot with their writing. So now in kindy they're doing very [well].

(Ashcroft parent)

Children access support to meet developmental milestones

In 2024, Mirrung achieved its goal of rolling out comprehensive developmental screening checks for all Preschool and Kindergarten students. Students were assessed by parents using an online universal screening tool, with results cross-checked by educators. Nearly 70% of the 4-5 year olds in the school were flagged as having some developmental vulnerabilities.

Ashcroft developed a comprehensive program of interventions to support these children. School staff participated in professional learning and rolled out small group speech and social and emotional development programs. Some students were referred to individual speech therapy and those with the most complex needs were referred to the Mirrung paediatrician.

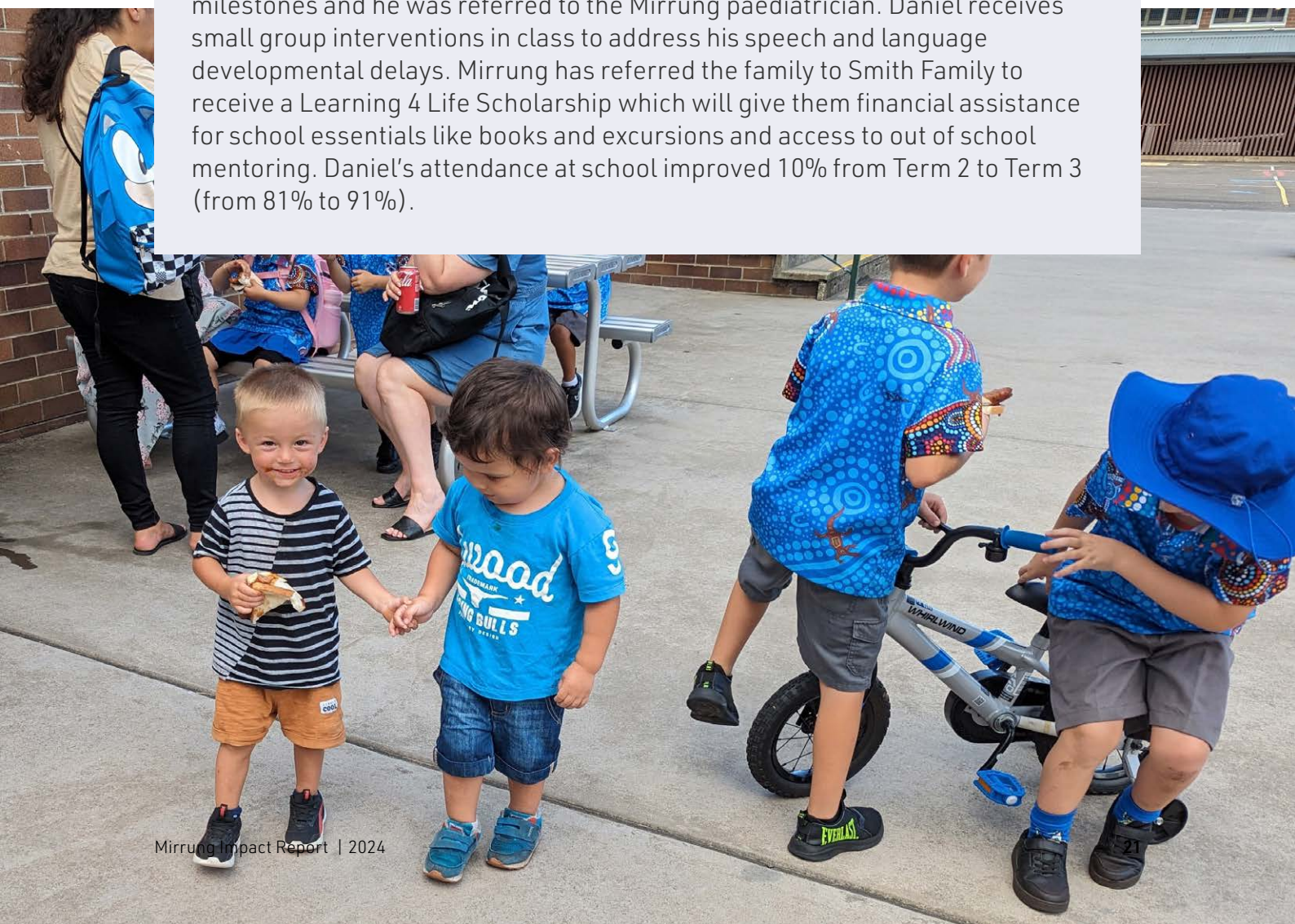
At the start of Term 4 2024, the school conducted a follow-up assessment and the number of students flagged as requiring further support had fallen by just over 40% (from 51 to 30 students).

Parents and carers of children in Kindergarten said that the developmental screening program was very helpful and that they appreciated the support subsequently provided to their children, particularly speech therapy support. One parent expressed their gratitude for identifying learning issues that the family had not noticed and for organising people to help. Early Stage 1 teachers spoke of the importance of identifying children with needs early.

In Preschool ... we do have a speech therapist now that does half a day on a Tuesday and we've got the vocab groups that are happening and you can see the improvement in the children's speech.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Daniel (not his real name) enrolled in Ashcroft Public School in Kindergarten 2024. He has had no formal early childhood education. Daniel's mum is Indigenous and lives in social housing, she has sole custody of her two children. Daniel's dad is incarcerated. They have had contact with the Department of Communities and Justice in the past. Mirrung met Daniel's mum in Term 1 and invited her to attend playgroup at The Beehive with her younger child. Mirrung identified a need and supported Daniel's younger sibling to get a speech assessment at Rainbow Cottage, Liverpool Hospital. He now receives ongoing speech therapy through an SWS LHD funded program that is delivered at the school. Daniel's physical and cognitive development was screened through Mirrung in Term 2. Results indicated he was missing key developmental milestones and he was referred to the Mirrung paediatrician. Daniel receives small group interventions in class to address his speech and language developmental delays. Mirrung has referred the family to Smith Family to receive a Learning 4 Life Scholarship which will give them financial assistance for school essentials like books and excursions and access to out of school mentoring. Daniel's attendance at school improved 10% from Term 2 to Term 3 (from 81% to 91%).



4.2 Enrichment and engagement outcomes for Ashcroft students

It makes students like school more knowing that they can have some fun after school.

(Ashcroft student)

[The children] come home happy and they want to participate in what's going on. A few years ago, they wouldn't have wanted to take part. And they wouldn't have had the opportunities either. They want to try something new.

(Ashcroft parent)

So, you... empower the parents as well. A lot of them might not be able to access paid afterschool activities like singing, dance lessons...So they're able to provide something for their child through the school, [and they] have a sense of pride.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Mirrung supported the introduction of enrichment and engagement activities at Ashcroft Public School in 2023 after community consultations highlighted how important it was to parents to be able to offer their children opportunities to follow their interests, but that they were hard to access and often unaffordable.

Students access diverse enrichment activities

The afterschool activities have become an integral part of the school.

| | # Different Programs | # Children Enrolled |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 2024 Afterschool Activities | 23 | 510 |
| 2023 Afterschool Activities | 20 | 451 |

Eighty-five per cent of students said that they think that the school offers a good selection of after school clubs and 93% of parents and carers said that their child can access extra-curricular activities through school.¹⁷

The types of programs offered include visual arts, crafts, music, team sports, board games, dance, gardening and a science club. Most activities are delivered by staff and some are delivered by outside providers but all activities are offered for free.

Students value their access to enrichment activities

Students, parents and carers, and staff all commented on how much they value the enrichment programs. The children are excited to attend, and parents would not otherwise be able to afford to provide these opportunities.¹⁸

There are always activities, and the kids are so engaged and they want to go to this excursion or there is an event. There are always things happening to engage the kids.

(Ashcroft parent)

The impact of the after-school clubs has been massive – it just brings different opportunities for them and the kids just love it.

(Ashcroft teacher)

¹⁷ September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (64% strongly agree, 29% agree).

¹⁸ First Nations parent focus group, 9 September 2024; Arabic speaking parent focus group, 9 September 2024; General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.



Students have commented that the afterschool programs make them want to come to school.

The afterschool clubs helped our attendance a lot more. Now we're normally in the nineties percent. Once before we weren't really good at coming to school.

(Ashcroft student)

It's made a huge impact on my little brother. [He] joined games on Thursday and now he always comes to school. Every day to play sport at recess and lunch with the boys.

(Ashcroft student)

Students develop agency and can contribute to school decisions

Mirring is committed to engaging with students about what initiatives they would like to see at Ashcroft Public School. The school leadership have identified student voice as an area for development in 2025. However, students commented that the school listens to their ideas:

...most of the time when we need something, the teachers listen and they take you seriously. And even in the afterschool clubs, for example, our group, the students can ask for what they can do or what they would learn and the teacher would listen and help them learn it.

(Ashcroft student)

4.3 Integrated health and wellbeing outcomes

[The] kids are accessing the breakfast club regularly, which is an initiative attached to Mirrung. So they're coming to class with a belly full. So, they already have a higher chance of accessing the learning of being engaged or being in a good mood because they're not hungry.

(Ashcroft staff)

We refer them to paediatricians; we refer them to other therapies. It's going to impact their life as a whole and not just today, tomorrow, it's a lifelong impact. So, like I said, we are definitely in the students' corners all the time.

(Ashcroft staff)

Strengthened student wellbeing and development is a key focus area of the Plan for NSW Public Education. The Plan commits to: implementing evidence-informed whole-school wellbeing approaches; building partnerships with students and families to connect them with the support that they need; and providing equitable access to services by building partnerships across agencies.¹⁹ All of these actions are features of the Mirrung approach, and students, parents/carers and school staff confirm that the health and wellbeing services provided through Mirrung are extremely important for Ashcroft Public School students and families.

Students and families access health and wellbeing services

During 2024, in response to needs identified in the school community, Mirrung has arranged for the following health and wellbeing services to be delivered:

- **Social support programs:** programs for small groups of students that are provided through partnerships with funded services and/or designed and delivered by Ashcroft Public School staff.
- **Allied health services:** including: a psychologist, a speech therapist and family counselling.
- **NDIS coordination:** Mirrung continues to support students to access NDIS funded services at school, ensuring that they can access the therapy that they need without missing school or their parents missing work to attend appointments.
- **Specialist appointments:** In 2024, Mirrung recruited a paediatrician to conduct clinics at Ashcroft Public School, removing barriers for families who need to access this specialist health care.
- **Whole-School Healthcare initiatives:** Mirrung supported 201 students to access free dental and eye-checks in 2024. Students identified as requiring glasses were provided these free of charge and minor dental work was delivered onsite. Mirrung worked with families to access major dental treatment where required offsite and free of charge.

¹⁹ NSW Government, [Plan for NSW Public Education](#), accessed 1 November 2024.

In addition, Mirrung facilitated various forms of wellbeing support for families, including:

- **Financial support:** 50 students from 24 families were accepted into the Smith Family Learning for Life Scholarship program which offers financial support for school-related expenses.
- **Food support:** over 800 frozen meals and over 100 food hampers were provided to families. Mirrung coordinates the donation of weekly fruit boxes and food for the school breakfast program (from Woolworths and Foodbank), and to provide students with lunch and recess if needed.
- **Household items:** some families have been offered donated furniture or equipment such as blankets, fans, laptops, prams and bike helmets.
- **Clothing drive:** Mirrung supported a second-hand clothing stall for parents to access good quality second-hand clothes for their children.

Eight-year-old Anna (not her real name) was playing with her siblings on the weekend when she fell and broke her front tooth in half. Anna came to school on Monday extremely self-conscious and explained that her parents were not able to afford to repair the tooth. Anna's classroom teacher contacted Mirrung to ask for support to get an appointment with a dentist. Within a week, and using the Child Dental Benefits Scheme, Mirrung was able to arrange for dental work to repair the tooth with no cost to the family. The rapport built between Anna's mother and the Mirrung team through that process led to her opening up about the children's father being incarcerated and the vulnerability she was feeling. Mirrung arranged for food deliveries to be made to the family home in the following weeks. Since then, Anna's mother has attended First Aid training at Mirrung. After this she approached Mirrung to request material support and was provided blankets, food hampers and frozen meals. Mum attends school events regularly and is comfortable approaching Mirrung to request help when needed.



Students and families value health and wellbeing support

Both students and parents and carers are extremely positive about the health and wellbeing supports provided at Ashcroft Public School. In response to the student survey, 83% of students said that they feel that they and their family can get help at the school if they need it, and in response to the parent/carer survey, 93% of parents/carers reported that the school understands what their child and family need.²⁰

A parent of a child with autism spoke about the support provided to his child, including speech pathology and psychology. He said that the teacher had gone 'the extra mile' and that his child 'tells me every day that she's had a great day. Just gives me the thumbs up that things have been good and, if there are any issues, I can have a good dialogue [with her teacher]'.²¹

Students are acutely aware of the role that the school is playing in supporting families:

And the teachers, they also, they're very nice about making us lunch. For the children that don't have lunch and food, they put us on snacks at the front and leave the door open. So, if any children that don't have food or lunch can just go and get some snacks.

(Ashcroft student)

And it helps the kids get food and the parents can rest easily without worries.

(Ashcroft student)

Parents and carers particularly appreciate the breakfast club that is available to them and their children, that the pantry is always stocked and that there are meals available for families to take home.²² The school provides uniforms if families don't have them and covers school excursions if the family cannot afford them.²³

Parents highlighted that the support is provided in a very private way – for example, they can help themselves to food without having to ask.²⁴ Parents commented:

Having that food on site is going to make a world of difference, a world of difference. We really, really need that for not only intellectual needs for children but actually, health needs that parents maybe don't have the money or the means to chase up.

(Ashcroft parent)

[The parents] know that if they need something, they have someone they can get in touch with no matter what it is about.

(Ashcroft parent)

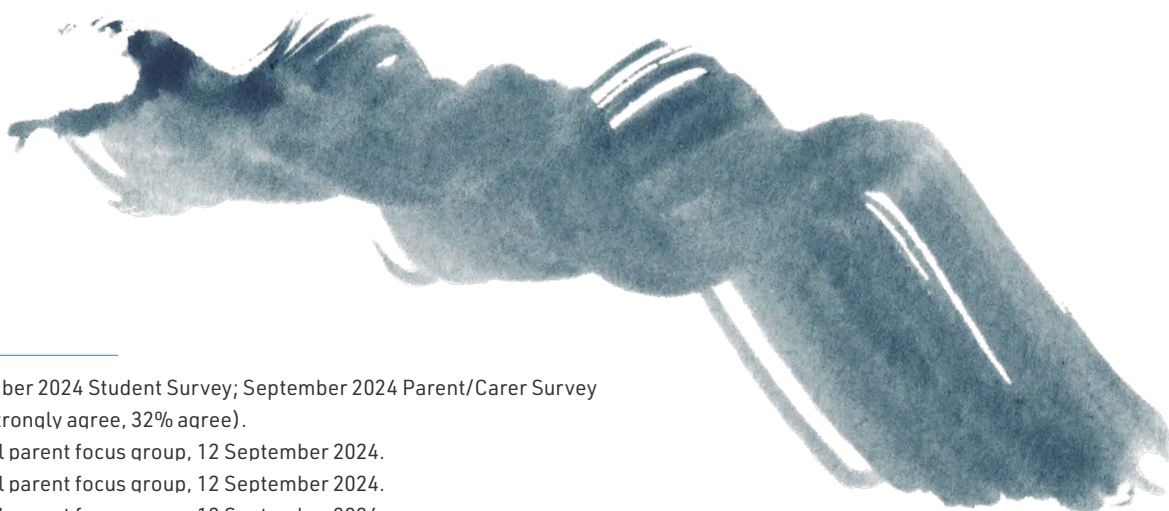
20 September 2024 Student Survey; September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (61% strongly agree, 32% agree).

21 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.

22 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.

23 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.

24 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.



Ashcroft staff proactively support student health and wellbeing

Ashcroft Public School staff and leaders commented on the profound impact of Mirrung's approach to supporting student and family wellbeing. Ninety-six per cent of teachers reported that Mirrung helps students and families access services when they are needed,²⁵ and that Mirrung has contributed to improved student and family health and wellbeing.²⁶

Importantly, Mirrung has built teachers' confidence to support students, with 89% of teachers reporting that they feel more confident to proactively support student health and wellbeing than they had previously.²⁷ Teachers and school leadership commented that this support helped teachers focus on their work as educators and also reduced their workload.

Teachers commented that through Mirrung they can help families access services about which they were previously unaware:

We can refer them to Mirrung, we can talk to the people that work there and get access to services that we wouldn't have known about for those parents.

(Ashcroft teacher)

The idea of no wrong doors and I know that's something that Mirrung really promotes... we're not social workers, we're teachers, but the nature of teaching and families in this area in particular is that people have very complex issues and you're aware that each time someone shares that that can be quite traumatising for them or very vulnerable. It just makes you feel confident and also... you're helping and caring by just being able to say, yep, come this way, or we can go talk to someone.

(Ashcroft teacher)

School leaders observed that teachers are increasingly willing to access support for families and that this translates into the staff themselves feeling more supported:

And I think there's been an increase in teachers saying, oh, can we grab a uniform for this child? Or this child has a broken tooth, can someone help with organisation of a dental appointment, can this child have a hat. Even excursions. Yeah, the teachers have been more willing to access support for families.

(School leader)

I think staff feel well supported and definitely as you said... the weight is definitely lifted off them that they know that they can go and speak to someone.

(School leader)

Staff highlighted that access to food translates into improved engagement with teachers and with learning more generally:

So, it's a great initiative because kids are actually eating proper food, better food, more nutritional food, and they actually are ready to learn because they're not thinking about food or being angry because they're 'hangry'.

(Ashcroft teacher)

It has bridged the gap between the classroom and home life. The way Mirrung has been embedded into our school has helped target student needs (and their families) for social, emotional and wellbeing. This has helped us to care for them in the classroom as their basic needs are taken care of.

(Ashcroft teacher)

25 September 2024 Staff Survey (59% strongly agree, 37% agree).

26 September 2024 Staff Survey (56% strongly agree, 41% agree).

27 September 2024 Staff Survey (48% strongly agree, 41% agree).

4.4 Family engagement outcomes

Yeah, [in the past] there would normally be one or two parents in the back and nowadays it's just packed. There's not enough seats.

(Ashcroft student)

We created this whole [classroom parent volunteer] program because we are always here ... we want to help more around the school. We were so excited that they started the program because of us.

(Ashcroft parent)

So many parents come, they're comfortable with the environment. I know now they're looking at having parents come into the classroom and they've had so many people say yes, they'd like to be trained to do that. I don't think they would've said yes unless they were comfortable come in and do that. The fact that they want to be in the classroom is amazing.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Family engagement is a critical element of a thriving school community. Embedding family voice in decision-making is a key element of the Mirrung approach.

More parents and carers participate in the school

Parent and carer involvement in school-related activities increased significantly in 2024 with several events welcoming over 100 attendees. Parents and carers were also involved in Mirrung governance meetings, and in Mirrung evaluation meetings.

During 2024, Mirrung offered parents and carers a range of adult learning opportunities including in relation to food and nutrition, computing, conversational English, first aid, police in the community, Arabic storytime, painting and flower-arranging. There have been 83 parent enrolments in these programs, approximately the same number as in 2023.

One-hundred per cent of parents/carers reported that they feel welcome when they visit the school. One parent, who had low expectations when joining the school said: 'I felt so welcome.'²⁸ Parents and carers also said:

Parents wouldn't have come to the school at all two years ago. Parents want to come and participate.

(Ashcroft parent)

Now it's just so full of life.

(Ashcroft parent)

Students also value their family members participation at school – 85% of students said that they like having family members attend events at the school.²⁹ Students commented:

And parents come to all assemblies and events and all of our athletic carnivals to watch all the kids have fun.

(Ashcroft student)

I just wish for more events where parents can see their kids at school and how they're growing. I feel like it just makes everyone more comfortable with it.

(Ashcroft student)

²⁸ First Nations parent focus group, 9 September 2024.

²⁹ September 2024 Student Survey.

We also have events where we exchange old toys and clothes, and the parents are allowed to come in the building and just volunteer to help out other families. So, I think it's a really good place.

(Ashcroft student)

Parents and carers influence Mirrung planning and design

Parents reported that the school listens to their ideas about what families and children need to be happy and healthy and that they had been consulted about the activities and support that would help their children and families.³⁰ Some Arabic speaking parents said that the school is 'a place where we can open up and talk and we are heard'.³¹

Families feel connected, develop their skills and can support their child's learning

Parents and carers reported that Ashcroft Public School helps them to support their child's learning. Ninety-seven per cent of parents/carers reported that the school helps parents/carers to develop skills,³² and 94% of parents/carers reported that the school helps them to support their child.³³

Parents expressed a desire to work more closely with teachers so that they could help their children learn at home.³⁴

It would be great if once a month someone could teach us how to teach our kids, just a bit of guidance on how school functions, how we do this, how we do that.

(Ashcroft parent)

Both teachers and the school leadership commented that increased parent and carer engagement with the school helps them to support learning:

[speaking about parents] they're actually more engaged with the school community and more inclined to come and be part of the kids' learning and be part of the school community because they have that sense of belonging.

(Ashcroft leadership)

And I think to really feel that this school is theirs, it's not for us, it's for them and their families. And I think that that's changed a sense of connection for them.

(Ashcroft leadership)



30 General parent focus group, 12 September 2024.

31 Arabic speaking parent focus group, 9 September 2024.

32 September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (65% strongly agree, 32% agree).

33 September 2024 Parent/Carer Survey (66% strongly agree, 28% agree).

34 First Nations parent focus group, 9 September 2024.

