



AEDC Fact Sheet

Identifying and Planning for Children's Development

This factsheet provides an overview of the different ways information about children's learning and development can be identified and measured, and how the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) and the data it produces can be used alongside other information collected and utilised in the early years to ensure all children are supported to thrive.

Summary of the AEDC

The AEDC tracks children's early development nationally. Teachers report on the development of each child in their classroom in the first year of full-time school. The AEDC is conducted every three years, with the first national census conducted in 2009. Data is reported at the school, community, jurisdictional, and national level to form a snapshot of early childhood development.

For an overview of the AEDC, visit the [AEDC website](#).

Approaches to identifying children's development

Information about children's learning and development can be captured in different ways with different objectives. These can be broadly categorised into individual and population level measurement.

Individual level measurement

Individual level measurement collects information with the aim of understanding an individual child's abilities, to inform appropriate programming and supports for that child.

Individual level measurement of children's early development can take many different forms, including preschool transition statements, developmental checks conducted by Child and Family Health Services, or developmental assessments upon entry to school. Current practice in individual level measurement to understand child development varies across States and Territories with no nationally consistent measure.

Examples of individual level measures upon school entry include:

- [Best Start Kindergarten Assessment in New South Wales](#)
- [Progressive Achievement Tests in Tasmania](#)
- [OnEntry Assessment Program in Western Australia](#)

In Australia, individual level measurements such as these tend to focus on children's literacy and numeracy, with information predominantly collected one-on-one with a child (i.e., direct assessment).

Research shows that pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills at school entry are important for a child's continued learning and development at school. However, a range of factors in early childhood across the family, community, services, and policy levels are also vital in helping to support children's ongoing development, each playing a unique and critical role in children's early experiences.

Population level measurement

Population level measurement seeks to identify patterns in children's development within cohorts or populations, such as schools, communities, or at the jurisdictional or national level. While data is collected about individual children, information is aggregated to form a snapshot of development among that population.

Globally, Australia is the only country that regularly and consistently implements population level measurement of children's development nationally, using the AEDC. The AEDC captures information across five [developmental domains](#), as pictured in Figure 1.

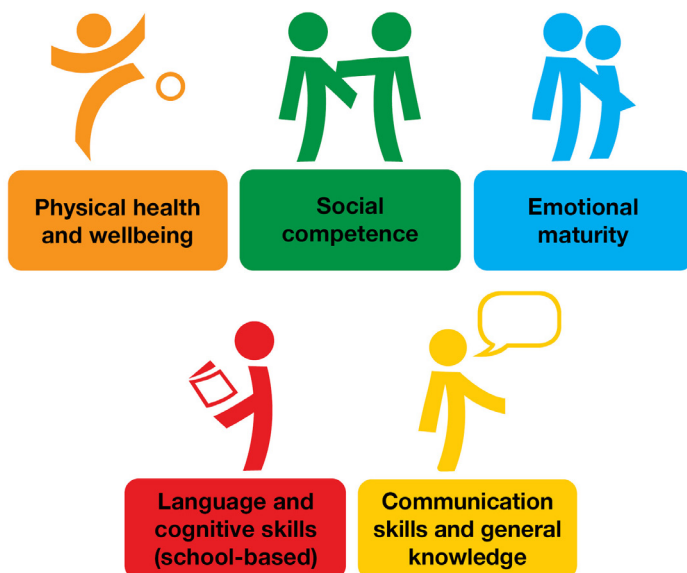


Figure 1. AEDC developmental domains

Although the AEDC is completed for individual children in their first year of school, it is not used to understand the development of individual children or their learning and developmental needs in the classroom. Rather, the AEDC acts as an indicator of children's holistic development. AEDC data is aggregated at the school, community, state/territory and national level, and in this way provides insight into how families, communities, services, and governments have supported children's holistic development before school. AEDC data, linked to other information can then be used to explore factors influencing children and families and in this way can inform future efforts to support all children to reach their developmental potential.

Individual and population level data supporting schools and communities

While information collected through individual and population level measures can support schools and communities in different ways, they work toward the same goal of understanding children's development to inform planning for children, including teaching, policy, services, and environments.

In this way, both types of information can feed into schools' understanding of how children are developing when they start school, including how communities are supporting children and families in the early years, and how schools can prepare for children starting school and support diverse learning and development needs.

Teachers and schools can use individual level information including transition statements and on-entry assessments to understand an individual child's strengths as well as areas that may need greater support.

This information can be used to:

- Inform educational programming that best supports the next steps in each child's learning.
- Monitor individual children's progress in learning over time.
- Identify developmental concerns and refer children for additional assessment or support.
- Provide parents and caregivers with information about their child's learning.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention and supports.

Schools can also use population level information collected via the AEDC to understand the development of children in their community. This can be used to:

- Inform whole of school responses to plan appropriate supports for incoming cohorts of children.
- Provide a shared understanding with local community, services, and government regarding the strengths of children within the community and where supports may be needed.
- Feed into longer term school system planning and improvement.

Similarly, AEDC data enables schools and communities to track how they have supported children and families in the early years of life. It can be used to:

- Identify areas of strength and vulnerability in the community, either in certain domains or among particular sub-groups of children, to inform resourcing and supports.
- Create visibility of all children in the community to guide planning, including children from families who may not access services or supports.
- Monitor community trends in development over time and identify factors driving this, so that supports can be aligned with the evolving needs of children and families.
- Provide evidence to support local policy and planning to support families in the early years.

Further information about how schools and communities can use AEDC data is available [here](#).

Measurement in action: Example – school starting age

A common decision both parents and policy makers are faced with is the age at which children should start full-time school. Currently, starting age policy differs across states and territories in Australia. For instance, in the Australian Capital Territory children can start full-time school in term one if they turn five by April that year, while in Tasmania, children start in term one in the year they are five in January.

Policies and practice converge at these points, with both individual and population level data available to guide decision making.

Individual level measurement could be used:

- to understand an individual child's development and abilities and this information can help determine if, for instance, additional time in preschool would be beneficial, or what supports the child might need when starting school to ensure they are set up for success.

Population level measurement, such as the AEDC data, could be used:

- to understand the range of development within the community of children, including strengths and levels of developmental vulnerability
- by teachers and schools to ensure schools are prepared for children, including ensuring curriculum and teaching spans the appropriate developmental range to meet the needs of all children or that the

school has appropriate resources and community partnerships to facilitate equitable access to schooling by engaging relevant supports for children with complex needs.

Key points

Different kinds of developmental measures can provide schools, communities, and policy makers with data about the developmental health and wellbeing of children in their school, community or jurisdiction and support them to make informed decisions to create better outcomes for children and families.

Factors across the family, community, service, and policy level all play unique and critical roles in helping to support children's development.

- Nurturing families provide a secure base for children to develop foundations for learning, development and wellbeing.
- Connection to community and culture can help to build children's sense of belonging.
- Services and systems support children and families to thrive when they are accessible, culturally safe and meet their needs.
- Policies, programs and environments that prioritise addressing social factors and supporting families holistically can enable parents and caregivers to better support their children's health, wellbeing and development.

The AEDC captures powerful population level data, providing a consistent and evidenced based indicator of child development alongside other information sources. Together, this information can be used to inform strategic system level policy and local services and supports to ensure children are well supported in all aspects of their learning and development in the years before school and at school entry, are met with the supports they need to thrive.

Relevant resources

- [AEDC Fact Sheet: Validity and Reliability of the AvEDI](#)
- [AEDC User Guides](#)
- [AEDC Fact Sheet: AEDC Summary](#)
- [WA AEDC Engagement Kit](#)