



mirrung

IMPACT REPORT

2025

About this report

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

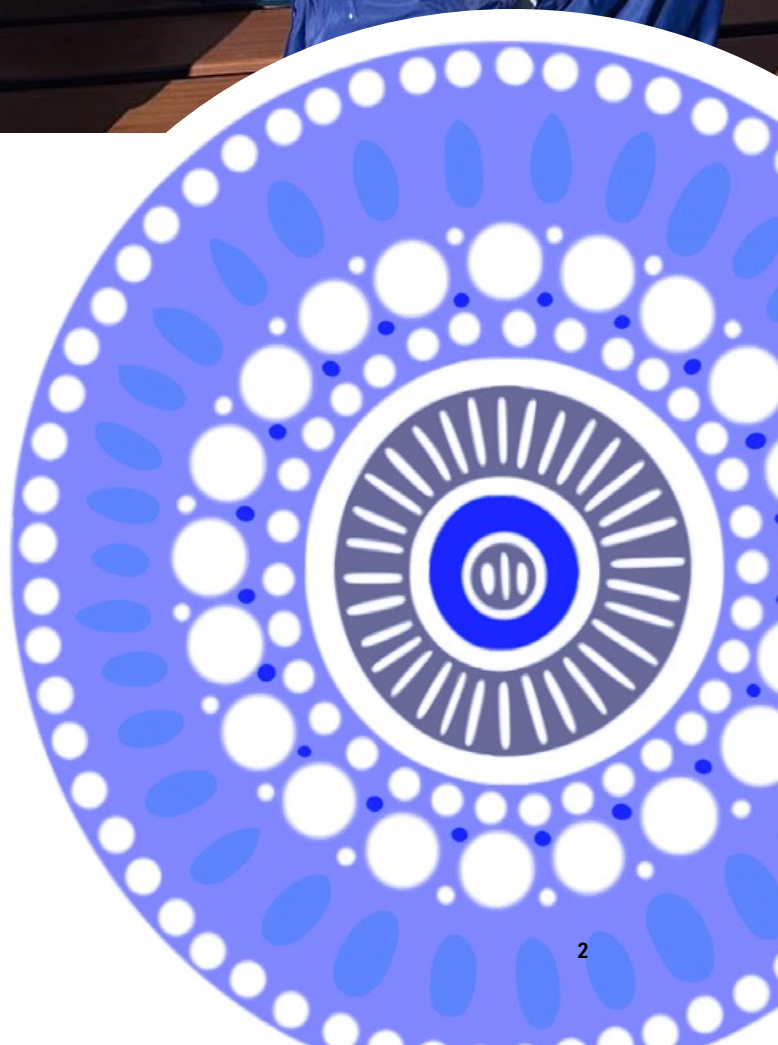
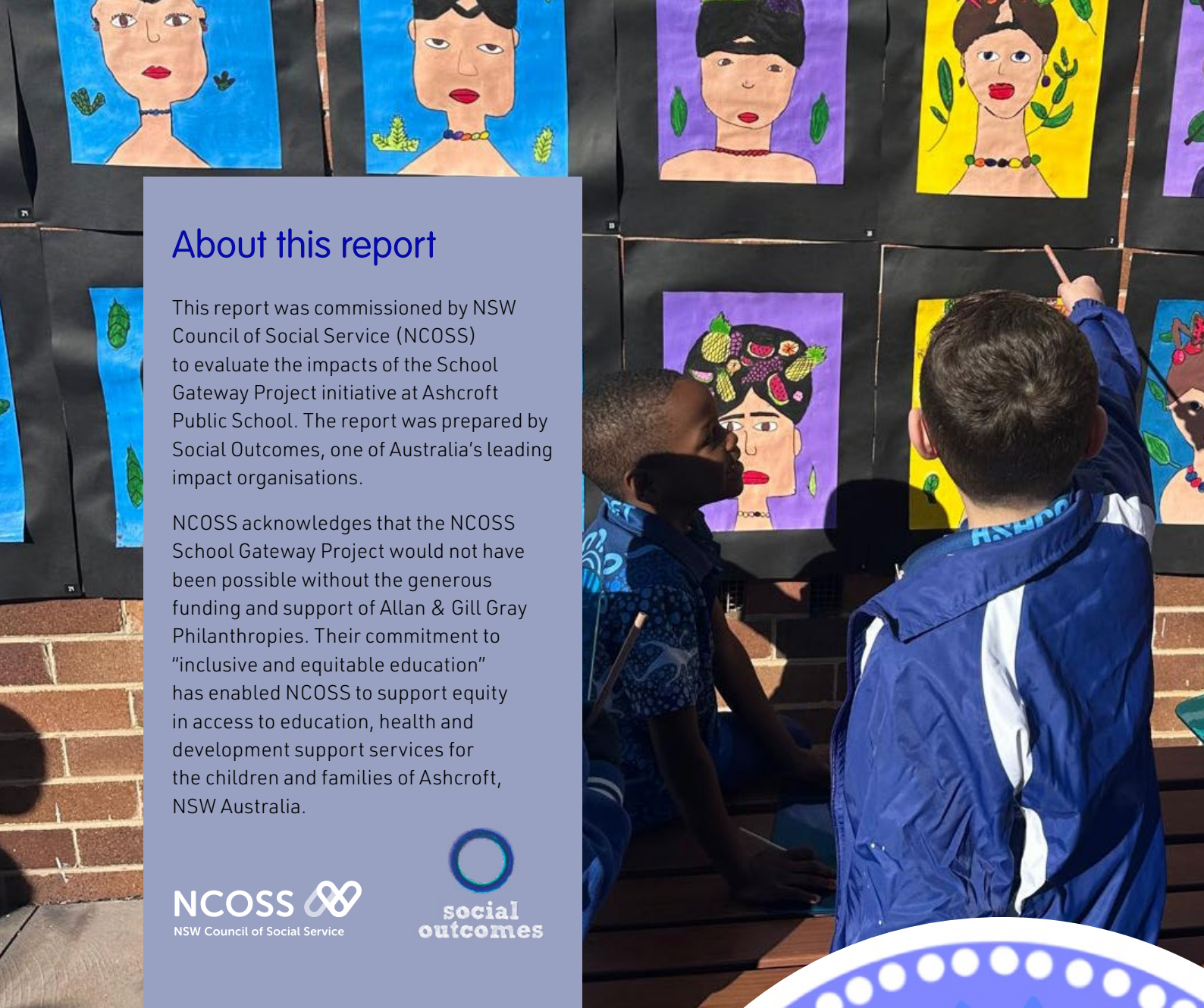
NCOSS acknowledges that the NCROSS School Gateway Project would not have been possible without the generous funding and support of Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropies. Their commitment to "inclusive and equitable education" has enabled NCROSS to support equity in access to education, health and development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

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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

This is the foundation that starts here. If the whole family is good, then the kids are good, then we're able to bring our kids to school and they will learn and be at peace.

(Ashcroft parent)

See Mirrung's definitely changed the culture of the school for community ... everyone [is] working together, we all aim to get the same result. And we're all here to make a difference for the kids.

(Ashcroft SLSO)

It's a complete culture shift to this holistic way of thinking where you look after the whole family and you help the family meet its social needs and then that's how the children thrive.

(Director, Educational Leadership)

And the focus of Mirrung and the school, they focus on the whole family, not just on the kids, the whole family.

(Ashcroft parent)

Mirrung is an innovative, place-based initiative in its third year of operation at Ashcroft Public School. The establishment of Mirrung has been transformative for the Ashcroft Public School community.

The vision is that **all children can reach their learning potential regardless of where they live, their cultural background or their socioeconomic status**. To achieve this, Mirrung provides holistic support to children **and** their families, to meet educational, health and wellbeing needs.

The results have been remarkable. Three years after the establishment of Mirrung there have been improvements in student outcomes, family engagement and teacher wellbeing. The school has become a community where children and their carers feel safe, supported and encouraged to thrive.

Mirrung is no longer a description of a specific 'wellbeing space' in the school where students and parents can go for support; Mirrung now describes a whole-of-school culture.

At Ashcroft Public School, education, health and social services staff work together to support the health and wellbeing needs of children and families – based on an understanding that for children to thrive, families need to thrive. Every staff member recognises the importance of engaging both the students and their families. The school culture emphasises that there should be 'no wrong door' for a family seeking assistance, that relationships matter, and that this school can offer a safe place for families to access critical health and social services that otherwise seem out of reach.

The school's focus on whole-of-family wellbeing has led to ongoing improvements in student attendance, with the school now above the NSW state average. Academic performance has improved significantly since 2022. And student wellbeing is consistently high, with students reporting a very strong sense of belonging and connectedness to Ashcroft Public School.

There has also been steady growth in family engagement with the school – parents and carers are participating in school events in record numbers, and in a range of adult education and engagement opportunities. Families who were initially hesitant to ask for help now feel comfortable to approach the school for support – and the Mirrung team within the school are flexible and responsive, providing help to access a wide range of supports, from healthcare, to food, to support with meeting housing needs.

Teachers are uniformly positive about Mirrung's impact – professional learning about the impact of disadvantage has supported teachers to take a more empathetic, patient and supportive approach to students and families, which has improved relationships and helped create a positive environment for students. Mirrung has also had a profoundly positive impact on teacher wellbeing.

This impact report, prepared by Social Outcomes, documents Mirrung's achievements after three years of operation. Social Outcomes spoke to students, parents and teachers in focus groups, considered the results of bespoke surveys and examined administrative data.

What Mirrung means to students and families

Mirrung is the Dharug word for belonging. A key element of the Mirrung approach is to support all Ashcroft children and families to feel like they belong and are valued.

When Ashcroft students were asked what Mirrung meant to them, they said:

Support; home; safety; magnificent; helpful; unique; caring; respectful; family; resilient

- There is a lot of sport.
- Everybody is really kind.
- There is hardly any bullying.
- Ashcroft is 'one team'.
- Mirrung supports us with many resources and gives us stuff to do.
- If you can't afford anything, they help you out; help you pay it.
- It's easy to make friends at Ashcroft Public School.

Families valued the sense of community that they find at Ashcroft Public School:

It does feel like more like family than a school community. It feels like a family community.

(Ashcroft parent)

For me, the biggest thing would be the sense of community that my kids feel.

(Ashcroft parent)

It's the sense of community within the kids themselves and the support of families. I'm a single mum of four, so the support I get from Mirrung is quite a bit.

(Ashcroft parent)

Mirrung's impact for students and families

Words cannot express how fantastic the school is – excellent leadership, staff, students and community. It has become a place of learning, positivity and inclusiveness.

(Ashcroft parent)

School attendance has significantly increased

Students [are more motivated to] want to be at school, [and] they understand that we have things in place to support them. I think they know they're cared about here and ... our attendance is soaring.

(Ashcroft teacher)

The school is amazing; the teachers and staff are very nice and welcoming. My child loves coming here.

(Ashcroft parent)

Ashcroft Public School had a 90.4% attendance rate in September 2025 – above the Liverpool network average of 84.8% and the NSW state average of 88%

65.8% of students attended school 90% or more of the time in September 2025 – a 29.3 percentage point increase from the same time of year in 2022 (36.5%)

Student academic performance is improving

Mirrung is a vital program that reflects the heart of Ashcroft Public School. It bridges learning, wellbeing, and community support, making a real difference in the lives of our students and their families. Continued investment in this initiative will only deepen its positive impact.

(Ashcroft teacher)

In 2025, the following proportion of Ashcroft students achieved stage appropriate outcomes:

Comprehension: 59%, which is 29.5 percentage points higher than in 2023 (29.5%)

Number and place value: 38%, which is 20 percentage points higher than in 2023 (18%)

Phonics Screening Check: 44%, which is 18 percentage points higher than in 2023 (26%)

Student and family wellbeing is strong and growing

I like Ashcroft PS because this is the safest place and the support for my family is the best.

(Ashcroft parent)

Ashcroft PS goes above and beyond to help not only the students but the entire community.

(Ashcroft parent)

97% of students said they have a strong sense of belonging at school

92% of students said that they have strong connectedness to school

100% of parents/carers said the school understands what their child and family need

100% of teachers said that Mirrung contributes to improved student and family wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing is strong and growing

The support for teachers is massive. Having the extra support and resources takes a load off of teachers at APS, to allow us to support student learning. The mental load is smaller knowing that they are there to support when needed.

(Ashcroft teacher)

93% of staff said that their understanding of the impact of poverty on students and their families is better because of Mirrung

87% of staff said that their wellbeing as a staff member is better because of the support that Mirrung provides to students and their families



Mirrung by numbers 2025



44

students referred to
Mirrung through Learning
and Support processes



507

enrolments
in 23 different
Afterschool Clubs



19

patients of the Mirrung
paediatrician



1200

sausages



45

students accessed
NDIS-funded services
onsite at school



66

loaves of bread



49

students provided
speech pathology



1050

frozen meals and
115 food hampers



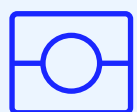
29

students provided
occupational therapy



43

parent and carer
attendances at adult
learning programs



96

students participated
in Aboriginal cultural
immersion programs



200

parent and carer
attendees at
school events

2 Codey's story

Codey is a sole parent with two children, in Preschool and Year 1. She says that Mirrung is 'amazing' and that Ashcroft Public School 'feels like a second home'.

It's just really amazing. Very heartwarming as well, knowing that we've got that support and anything like that, anytime we have any issues or we can just go see the school and they're happy to help, whether it is big or small.

In 2024, Codey was facing eviction from the public housing apartment in which she had lived since she was two years old, because the lease was in her grandmother's name when she unexpectedly passed away. Codey said that when she went to the Mirrung team to explain her situation, they went 'above and beyond'. They helped organise legal support and supported her in meetings with Homes NSW. Ultimately, Codey was successful in reversing the decision to evict her and she was able to retain her lease.

It's made a huge difference to both me and my kids because I thought we were going to end up on the street living in a tent somewhere. ... I can't thank [Mirrung] enough for all their help ... [and everything] they've done even to this day.

Before she started at the school, Codey's younger child was identified as having significant developmental delays. She has been supported with speech therapy and has shown progress in meeting developmental milestones this year. Codey's older daughter loves the enrichment activities, and is 'happier, enjoying more time with her friends, doing the things that she loves'.

In 2024, Codey approached Mirrung to ask whether they could set up a program to support parents to volunteer in the classrooms. The school responded by offering training to

any parents who were interested, and the result was that Codey and some other parents began volunteering in the classroom.

I didn't actually realise how many kids needed help until I started going there ... it is really good to watch the children [learn] and achieve.

In 2025, Codey commenced studying a Certificate 3 at TAFE in School-based Education Support. She is doing her placement at Ashcroft Public School and hopes to transition to paid employment at the school when she completes her studies.

I'm excited to finish this course and start the new chapter of my life.



3 About Mirrung

I think [Mirrung is] sensitive to the community needs in general. A lot of people around this area struggle, struggle with a lot of things that I guess a lot of people take for granted. And here, ... there's nothing too much to ask. Whether it be food, obviously accommodation, clothing.

(Ashcroft parent)

I think the biggest thing is just the cultural shift in the community, the fact that they are more inclined to reach out for help. They're comfortable to just pop in. ... Just the whole culture of the community has changed I think. And just they're comfortable in asking for help. They're not embarrassed.

(Ashcroft leadership)

Everybody belongs and everybody matters.

(Ashcroft SLSO)

Early learning

Young Ashcroft children are offered high quality learning; developmental milestone screening for assessment of appropriate early intervention and health supports; and better transitions give children the best start in learning.

Enrichment and engagement

School students are offered extra-curricular activities and enrichment experiences; encouraging and promoting student voice and agency in program design.

Integrated health and wellbeing

Families are offered coordinated and tailored health and wellbeing services to meet needs; student wellbeing is supported through effective referral and follow up; and families are supported to navigate service systems to access appropriate supports.

Family engagement

Parents/carers are offered access to a wide range of formal and informal engagement opportunities; adult learning activities; volunteering; and school and parent events.

Mirrung's Impact

Improved school attendance

Academic growth

Improved wellbeing and sense of belonging

Figure 1 The Mirrung Model

3.1 The Mirrung journey

Mirrung opened as a wellbeing hub within Ashcroft Public School in 2022, in a partnership between the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) and the NSW Department of Education.

NCOSS involvement in the work has been generously supported by five years of philanthropic funding by Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropy Australasia and the Allan & Gill Gray Philanthropic Foundation.

- **2020:** NCOSS obtained seed funding to explore the potential of a school-based wellbeing hub.
- **2021:** The project was launched and the Ashcroft Public School site chosen.
- **2022:** Consultation with First Nations community and adoption of the Mirrung identity; community stakeholder research supported by Western Sydney University; Mirrung team established and Mirrung spaces opened (school entrance building dedicated to Mirrung, Mirrung café, community kitchen and garden).
- **August 2022:** Mirrung is launched.
- **2023:** Mirrung team expanded to include onsite playgroup and preschool educators, Aboriginal Education Officer and Learning and Support staff; introduction of school-wide health initiatives, social support programs, allied health services and NDIS funded services onsite at school; focus on family engagement.
- **2024:** Mirrung team integrated into Ashcroft Public School Learning and Support team; focus on early learning outcomes; commencement of paediatric clinic; focus on professional learning for school staff about impact of disadvantage. Continue to deliver school-wide health initiatives and social support programs.
- **2025:** Mirrung shifts from being considered a distinct 'hub' space within the school, to a whole-of-school culture focussed on student and family wellbeing. Key impact measures show significant improvement since Mirrung's establishment. Consistently high levels of family engagement.

3.2 Who are the students and families of Ashcroft Public School?

Ashcroft is a diverse community, located in the south western suburbs of Sydney. Ashcroft is amongst the lowest 1% of all disadvantaged communities in NSW¹ and has the third highest rate of children living in poverty in NSW (39.4%).² In Ashcroft, 29.6% of households have a total weekly income of less than \$650, compared to 16.3% of households across NSW. And in 2021, Ashcroft had an unemployment rate of 11.9%, compared to the NSW state average of 4.9%.³

Ashcroft Public School reflects the demographic of the wider Ashcroft community. Students come from diverse backgrounds, with 74% having a language background other than English, and 14% identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.⁴ The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage of 900, which places it in the bottom 10% of all schools in Australia in terms of educational disadvantage.⁵

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, accessed 3 October 2025.

2 NATSEM/NCOSS, Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW (2021).

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Ashcroft, 2021 Census All persons Quickstats, accessed 3 October 2025.

4 MySchool, Ashcroft Public School, Ashcroft, NSW, accessed 3 October 2025.

5 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, School Profile 2024, accessed 3 October 2025.

3.3 Why was Mirrung established?

If they've got no housing, if they've got no food, kids are coming to school without those things and it impacts everything.

(Ashcroft leadership)

Mirrung was established to improve the learning outcomes for students at Ashcroft Public School through working with children and families to address their health and wellbeing needs. Mirrung was modelled on similar initiatives that had achieved positive results, including Our Place in Victoria, and on the evidence base regarding what is required to support the learning and development needs of children living in communities of deep and concentrated disadvantage.

Mirrung's design was based on extensive community consultation, and sought to respond to the aspirations of the local community, including:

- creating **safe outdoor spaces** for children to play; and places for parents and carers to share information and engage in learning
- easier access to **child health and development** services
- greater access to **sports** programs, **arts and craft** programs, **culture and language** classes, and **community-wide events and activities**
- that the school should be the **safest place** in the community.

Mirrung has sought to support better local service delivery so that children and families experience a more integrated, coordinated and accessible local service system aligned with community need. Mirrung's success has relied on effective collaboration and coordination between education, health and social service systems. This has required strategic leadership and access to knowledge and networks beyond those usually present in the education system. This expertise has been provided through the NCOS Project Director who has gradually transferred this knowledge to Ashcroft Public School staff.



4 Measuring Mirrung's key impacts

The biggest impact that Mirrung has at Ashcroft Public School is the way it creates a strong sense of belonging and connection for students, staff, and families. ... Mirrung has strengthened relationships across the school and made the community more inclusive and supportive.

(Ashcroft teacher)

I've never seen the data sets so completely, coherently and consistently move together. ... This is about lifting all children, everything all at once.

(Director, Educational Leadership)

Mirrung measures its success through three key metrics:

- improved school attendance
- academic growth
- improved wellbeing and a sense of belonging amongst students and their parents.

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

In addition to these core measures, Mirrung also tracks the following outcomes:

- students commence Kindergarten school-ready and show academic growth in Stage 1
- students feel a sense of belonging and can contribute to school decisions
- improved student and family health and wellbeing support a positive learning environment
- families feel connected to Ashcroft Public School and are better equipped to support their child's learning and are able to develop their own skills.

This year, we have also considered the impact that Mirrung has for Ashcroft Public School staff.



4.1 Attendance: students come to school more often

I think that the attendance is good because every Friday they collect all of the data from every class about how the attendance was and whoever had the highest attendance will get a reward.

(Ashcroft student)

I think the children also feel safe and feel secure and feel ... that they belong here and they take this home and now children are telling parents, I want to go to school, I want to go to school.

(Ashcroft SLSO)

If you don't come to school, that limits the amount of learning you'll get.

(Ashcroft student)

And every day they'll put over the announcement which classes are all here And you'll hear the kids in the afternoon when they read out [the announcement] and ... if they get their numbers up, they cheer out.

(Ashcroft parent)

School attendance is a critical contributor to a child's academic achievement. Three years ago Ashcroft's average attendance rate was below the average for NSW and statistically similar schools; in 2025 it exceeds all comparative averages.

In 2022 the average attendance rate at Ashcroft Public School was 82.5%, and in 2025 it was 90.4%. This is above the NSW state average (88.0%), above the attendance for schools in the Liverpool network (84.8%) and above that of statistically similar schools (87.6%) (see Figure 2 below).

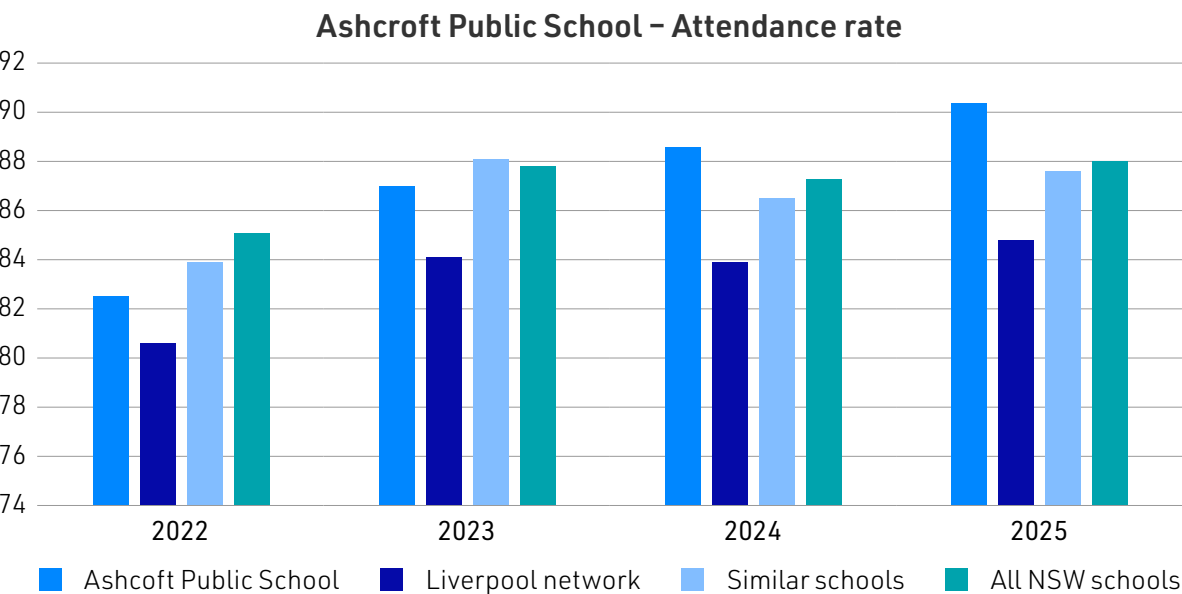


Figure 2: Ashcroft Public School attendance rate

Ashcroft Public School students, parents and teacher all spoke of the school's high attendance with pride. Students spoke about the connection between attendance and learning and could explain the school's attendance data. Students and parents also talked about the daily public acknowledgement of classes with high

attendance and the end of term rewards for students with high attendance.

Parents spoke of their children's commitment to be at school and associated high attendance with the positive and welcoming culture established at the school, as well as the activities and programs provided for the students.

4.2 Academic growth: student performance is improving

Ashcroft Public School students have shown impressive academic growth in the period since Mirrung’s establishment. Since 2023, Ashcroft Public School has measured academic growth through progress that the students make in three key areas: reading comprehension, number and place value; and the Year 1 phonics screening check, shown in Figure 3 below.

We can’t educate if they’re hungry; we can’t educate them [if they haven’t] slept at night. So it’s looking at the whole child instead of just education.

(Ashcroft teacher)

[If you] know that that child is doing okay and that their family’s doing okay and then you can focus when they’re in your classroom on the actual learning.

(Ashcroft teacher)

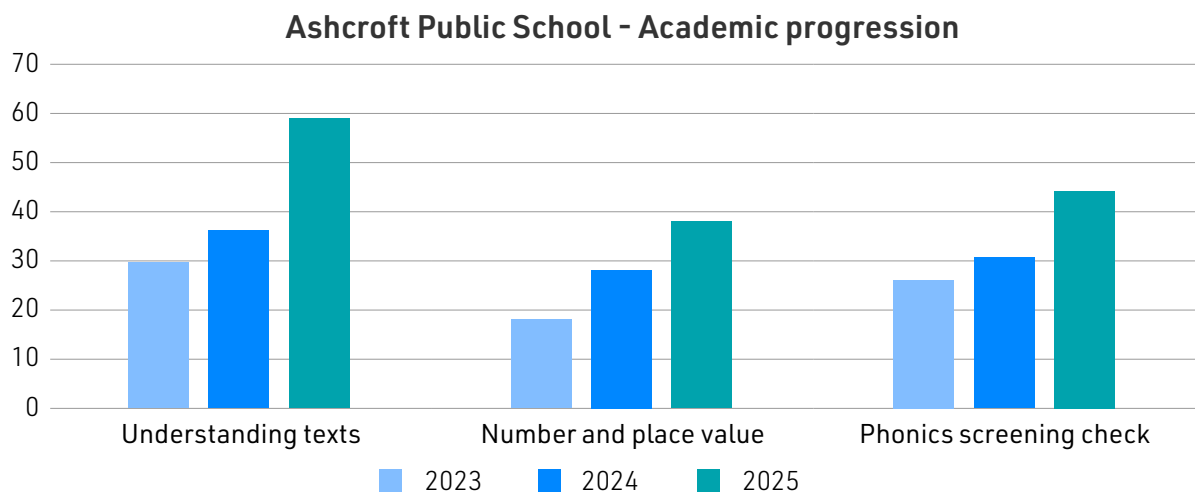


Figure 3: Ashcroft Public School academic progression

There are a range of possible explanations for the significant improvement in student academic performance, including improved student engagement, improved attendance, increased capacity for teachers to focus on teaching and learning, and improved overall wellbeing.

Ashcroft Public School leadership and teachers drew a strong link between the support provided through Mirrung and students’ learning performance. They noted the impact that wellbeing support has on students’ capacity to learn.

School leadership and teachers also observed that the support provided through Mirrung means that both teachers and the school executive have more capacity to focus on student learning. In response to a survey of school staff (30 respondents):

- 93% of respondents said that Mirrung means that they can spend more time supporting student learning⁶
- 100% of respondents said that they believed that Mirrung contributes to a positive learning environment at Ashcroft Public School⁷ (compared to 93% in the 2024 survey).

6 September 2025 Staff Survey (66.7% strongly agree, 26.7% agree).

7 September 2025 Staff Survey (73.7% strongly agree, 26.7% agree).

Further, in a parent survey conducted for this evaluation (61 respondents), 100% of parents and carers said that they believe that their child is supported in the classroom to work to their potential⁸ (compared to 91% in the 2024 survey).

The 2025 NSW Public School Survey results show the extent to which students at Ashcroft Public School are engaged in their learning. The survey results show that students at the school had very high levels of:

- experience of explicit teaching (98%)
- experience of effective feedback (92%)
- strong engagement (taking an active and self-directed role in their own learning including persisting with challenging tasks and seeking help when needed) (96%)
- strong motivation (92%).

These results are all higher than those recorded for statistically similar schools and for all NSW primary schools as shown in Figure 4 below.

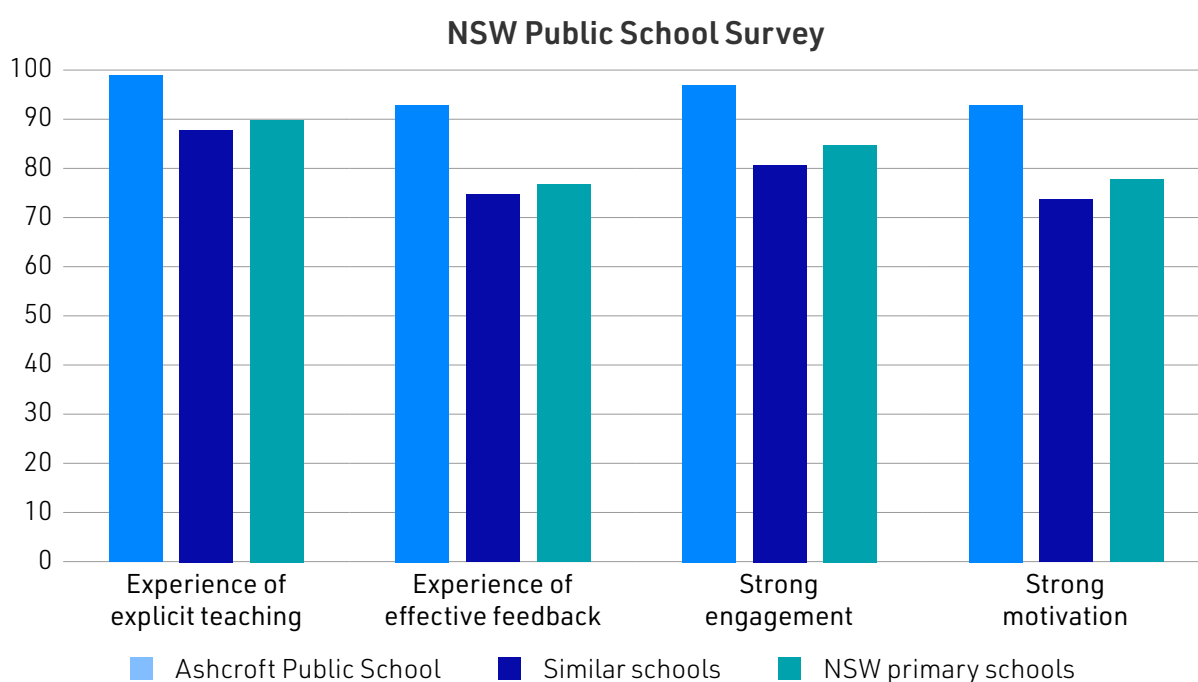


Figure 4: NSW Public School Survey

8 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (77.0% strongly agree, 23.0% agree).



4.3 Wellbeing: students and families feel connected and safe

Mirrung has created a strong sense of belonging for our families at Ashcroft by offering practical support and opportunities for connection. Programs like the community kitchen, breakfast club, and access to therapists help break down barriers, ensuring that every child is ready to learn and families feel valued, respected, and supported.

(Ashcroft teacher)

The way that Mirrung has brought in/ made welcome the community in the area cannot be understated. The level of welcome and warmth has increased and I feel that the families feel like they are a part of the school, with the school doing things for them, not just to them or without them. It breeds a spirit of confidence, autonomy and safety.

(Ashcroft teacher)

A basic premise of the Mirrung approach is when students and families feel connected and safe, student learning is enhanced. Students spoke about their sense of belonging at Ashcroft Public School, for both themselves and their families. One student said that their parents ‘feel like they belong here and that it is their second home’. Students also commented that it is very easy to make friends at school.

In 2025, the annual Tell Them From Me survey was replaced by the NSW Public Schools Survey and so the current results cannot be compared to previous years. However these new survey results are very positive, with high proportions of students reporting that they:

- have a strong sense of belonging at school (98%)
- have strong connectedness to school (students’ feelings of belonging, acceptance and pride within their school community) (92%)
- have a good friend at school (98%)
- feel good about culture at school (94%)
- have a supportive adult at school (92%).

These results are all higher than those recorded for statistically similar schools and for NSW primary schools as shown in Figure 5 below.

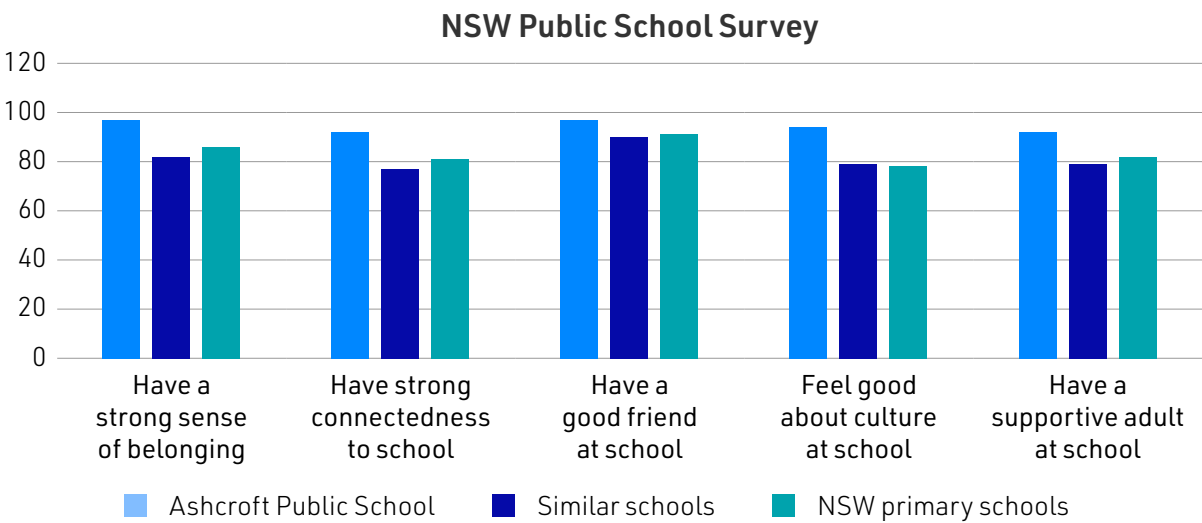


Figure 5: NSW Public School Survey

The Mirrung parent survey also showed high confidence that their children feel that they belong and are safe at Ashcroft Public School:

- 98% of parents/carers reported that their child feels that they belong at school⁹ (compared to 95% in the 2024 survey)
- 100% of parents/carers reported that their child feels safe at school¹⁰ (compared to 92% in the 2024 survey).

The Mirrung survey data also shows that parents/carers and staff feel that Mirrung is contributing to student and family wellbeing with 100% of respondents agreeing with the following statements:

Mirrung survey results		
	2025	2024
% of parents/carers said that the school understands what their child and family need ¹¹	100%	93%
% of parents/carers said that the school helps parents and carers when needed ¹²	100%	97%
% of teachers said that Mirrung contributes to improved student and family health and wellbeing ¹³	100%	96%
% of teachers said Mirrung helps their confidence to proactively support student health and wellbeing ¹⁴	100%	89%

4.4 Mirrung’s impact on staff

As a staff member, Mirrung allows me to better support students knowing their wellbeing and family needs are being addressed. It creates a collaborative environment where teachers, support staff, and external professionals can work together, which makes my role more effective and meaningful.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Mirrung’s support for children and their families has had a positive impact on Ashcroft Public School staff. This is revealed in the survey of school staff which indicated that:

- 93% of staff said that their understanding of the impact of poverty on students and their families is better because of Mirrung¹⁵
- 87% of staff said that their wellbeing as a staff member is better because of the support that Mirrung provides to students and their families.¹⁶

9 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (83.6% strongly agree, 14.8% agree).
10 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (82.0% strongly agree, 18.0% agree).
11 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (75.4% strongly agree, 24.6% agree)
12 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (85.3% strongly agree, 14.7% agree).
13 September 2025 Staff Survey (90.0% strongly agree, 10.0% agree).
14 September 2025 Staff Survey (63.3% strongly agree, 36.7% agree).
15 September 2025 Staff Survey (63.3% strongly agree, 30.0% agree).
16 September 2025 Staff Survey (66.7% strongly agree, 20.3% agree)

Improved teacher wellbeing

Teachers explained that Mirrung's support for their students and families improves their own sense of wellbeing. For example, one teacher reported previously having lost sleep through worrying about students, and that knowing that there is support available 'relieves the mental load' and that they 'don't have to worry ... during the school day as much'. Another teacher highlighted that 'I know that if I refer a family/child to Mirrung that they will receive help far better than I could ever give, taking the burden off me'.

Another teacher observed that she had felt a sense of 'responsibility/fear' for students regarding their 'home life, medical needs [and] social/housing needs', and that addressing such issues can be 'daunting' for teachers who want to help but are not social service professionals. This teacher said that: 'It feels wonderful to be able to reach out with families in order to get them help and support.'

Several teachers confirmed that it helps to know who to go to if a family needs help and that there is a clear and well understood process to follow if a member of the school community needs help. One teacher explained that 'we have a [set] process and there are people who can help anywhere from paediatricians to social workers'.

Teachers also commented on the positive culture at Ashcroft Public School – one teacher said 'I think it is a really nice place to work and I think that all the staff here, there is ... community involvement and everyone works together and everyone has the child at the first point of mind'. Another said that they are proud to 'contribute to an environment that is inclusive, respectful, and focused on building strong relationships'.



Teachers can focus on classroom learning

The wellbeing support offered by the Mirrung team frees up classroom teachers to focus on teaching and learning. For example, one teacher said that 'because we can externalise or separate some of those responsibilities that teachers often encounter when they're not social workers', there is 'an ease where you can be more present and more content and more positive and just feel more assured when you're with the children'. Another said that knowing that a 'child is doing okay and that their family's doing okay' means that the teacher can focus 'when they're in your classroom on the actual learning'.

Ashcroft Public School leadership and teachers also spoke of the improved behaviour in the school and attributed that to the Mirrung approach and the provision of health and wellbeing support. A member of the school leadership team reported that student behaviour has improved 'massively' in the time that she had been at the school. She said 'the number of kids going out of class to be sent to an executive office or receiving behaviour notes' has reduced significantly. This also improves teacher capacity to focus on classroom learning.

Teacher capability is developed

Ashcroft Public School leadership commented on the importance of professional learning about the impacts of poverty, and that this learning has contributed to a change in mindset, enabling teachers to be calmer and less judgemental with families. One teacher noted the importance of 'learning about trauma and what's going on for them in their world', which explains 'that there's so much going on for them that when they get here they're ... in a safe space [and] their body's finally relaxing'. She said that she understood why students might 'find things a little bit more difficult' and that 'we need to be a bit more explicit and give [the students] a bit more time'.

Another noted her appreciation that Mirrung has supported a deepening of her understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and perspectives, helping her to 'bring more cultural awareness into my teaching and daily interactions'.

5 Mirrung's pillars of change

In addition to the key impact areas discussed above, the Mirrung model has four areas through which it works to support positive outcomes for students and families.

- Excellence in early learning
- Student enrichment and engagement
- Integrated health and wellbeing
- Family engagement



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

Through prioritising these four areas, Mirrung has sought to support the following outcomes:

- students commence Kindergarten school-ready and show academic growth in Stage 1
- students feel a sense of belonging and can contribute to school decisions
- improved student and family health and wellbeing support a positive learning environment

- families feel connected to Ashcroft Public School and are better equipped to support their child's learning and are able to develop their own skills.

Each of these outcomes contribute to the overall goals of improved attendance, academic growth and improved wellbeing.

5.1 Excellence in early learning

They took her straight in, accepted her straight away. So it was great. She got to meet the kids. They took her over to the kindy for the transition programs and all that. So that made so much easier for her.

(Ashcroft parent)

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

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

Mirrung does this by supporting local families to access onsite supported playgroup and Preschool and through a closely curated transition into Kindergarten.

Children from Ashcroft engage in early learning

The proportion of Ashcroft residents who attend the playgroup and Preschool onsite at Ashcroft Public School has been steadily increasing since 2022.

In 2025:

- 43% of children attending the Beehive playgroup were from the Ashcroft area (compared to 30% in 2024 and 35% in 2023)
- 62% of children attending the Ashcroft Preschool were from the Ashcroft area (compared to 55% in 2024 and 56% in 2023)

A high proportion of children are also transitioning from the Preschool to Kindergarten at the Ashcroft Public School. In 2025, 73% of students currently attending the Preschool will make the transition in 2026 (compared to 71% who transitioned to start Kindergarten in 2025 and 64% who transitioned to start Kindergarten in 2024).

Children transition to Kindergarten well

Parents with children who had attended the onsite Preschool reported that their children were already very familiar with Ashcroft Public School and commented positively about the efforts made to support the children's transition to Kindergarten. For example, parents noted that Preschool students were invited to attend primary school activities, which gave them the opportunity to meet other teachers and students.

One family had a Preschool age child who had significant support needs and were looking for a school to enrol in, having been turned away from other schools. When they enrolled their child in Ashcroft Public School to commence Kindergarten in 2025, the school recommended to the parents that they enrol in the Ashcroft Preschool immediately (in 2024) so that the school could assess the child's needs and support her to transition in 2025. The school organised access to an occupational therapist and for NDIS therapists to work with the child at school. The parents said that the school had made the transition 'so much easier for us as a family'. They said that they had been helped with 'everything that we have asked for'.

Children access support to meet developmental milestones

During 2025, Ashcroft Public School undertook developmental screening of the Preschool cohort and of those students in Kindergarten who had not previously attended Ashcroft's onsite Preschool. Students who were identified as having developmental vulnerabilities were supported through an individualised program of supports ranging from in-class adjustments to small group speech and occupational therapy. Where the screening raised significant concerns students were referred to Mirrung for paediatric assessment.



5.2 Integrated health and wellbeing

All the words in the world wouldn't be able to express how we feel and how it's helped us. So I just can't speak highly enough of it.

(Ashcroft parent)

As a family we like it that if anyone needs help/support that we feel comfortable to reach out and ask.

(Ashcroft parent)

Kids do not have a jumper on a day [when] it's cold, they can go there, check it out and [get] a jumper on. [And] even the kids are aware they'll come back home with something from the pantry.

(Ashcroft parent)

Mirrung is a huge support for this area because we have people [who] ... don't have the funds ... to purchase everything for their kids.

(Ashcroft parent)

Central to the Mirrung approach is support for the health and wellbeing needs of children and families. In addition to fostering an environment where students and families feel safe and valued, Mirrung seeks to reduce the barriers faced by many families in accessing community support services. Thus the Mirrung program seeks to track whether:

- Ashcroft Public School students and families can access responsive, timely and appropriate health and social support services
- Ashcroft Public School staff feel equipped to proactively support student health and wellbeing.

Students and families access services

I had a student in kindergarten and his family lost their housing and they were in a motel and it was winter and there was no heating and they were cold and basically mum had indicated she was cold, but that's all she would say. And I mentioned it to someone and then the next day I had 10 blankets in my room and at the end of the day I just waited until no one else was there and I said, oh, I have something for you. And we just walked down to the car. So that just felt very discreet and respectful and helpful.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Integrated health and social support services offered at Ashcroft broadly include:

Health and social support services

- **Social support programs:** programs for small groups of students that were provided through partnerships with funded services and/or delivered by Ashcroft Public School, including external programs supporting transition to high school and Aboriginal cultural programs.
- **Allied health services:** school funded allied health services which included a psychologist, and speech therapist, utilised in 2025 by 37 students. Family counselling was also provided for a small number of families.
- **NDIS coordination:** In 2025, 45 students accessed NDIS funded services at school, ensuring that they could access the therapy that they needed without missing school to attend appointments.
- **Paediatrician appointments:** 19 students accessed appointments with the Mirrung paediatrician.

- **School-wide health interventions:** In 2025, Mirrung supported 121 students to access a free dental check-up. The school also supported the provision of speech therapy (49 students) and occupational therapy (29 students) in small groups.

Financial and material support

- **Financial support:** In 2025, 59 students participated in the Smith Family Learning for Life scholarship program which offers financial support for school-related expenses. Mirrung also provided support to families experiencing financial challenges for example by helping families facing unaffordable utility bills to access financial support or to negotiate payment plans with their providers.
- **Food support:** Extensive food support is provided through Mirrung, in 2025 this included over 1000 frozen meals, over 100 food hampers, and access to an open pantry that stocks dry goods. Mirrung also coordinates a breakfast program, a weekly fruit box, and weekly donations of bakery items that can be taken home by families.
- **Household items:** Mirrung supported families to access prams, nappies, toiletries, and furniture and other household items.
- **Clothing drive:** Mirrung supported the sourcing of high-quality second-hand clothing that is available for families as needed.

Social support system navigation

- **Social service supports:** Mirrung supported families to navigate the social services system, including communicating with Centrelink, Homes NSW and social service agencies
- **Housing support:** Mirrung supported families experiencing housing issues, including around access to social housing, organising repairs to social housing, or organising emergency housing.

Students and families value access to services

Students, parents and school staff all value the health and social support services provided at Ashcroft Public School. In response to the Mirrung survey, all parents surveyed reported that the school understands what their children and family needs, and that the school helps parents and carers when needed. All school staff surveyed reported that Mirrung contributes to improved student and family health and wellbeing.

One family reported that prior to coming to Ashcroft their family had been 'going through a bit of a hard time' and that the welcome that they received at Ashcroft had been 'life changing for our family'.

Parents and carers reported that the services provided met specific needs which 'vary from family to family' and also that the support is provided confidentially. Another parent said that 'everyone needs help at times' and that she valued the way that Ashcroft supported her with her parenting, in particular 'helping us to help our children deal with their emotions'.

Ashcroft Public School students commented that it was helpful to families to have access to food. Parents spoke about the importance of the breakfast club in the school, and that some families rely on the frozen meals and hampers provided by the school. One parent said 'you can see that we've got a little pantry for people that run out of something to come in and help [themselves] and it's really good'. Another parent said: 'I love the fact that they don't make it shameful ... it's not like someone is going to say, here's your box of food for everyone else to see'.



5.3 Student enrichment and engagement

We could never afford to give them the opportunities they've got through the afterschool [clubs].

(Ashcroft parent)

My ideal world is all the kids going on as many excursions and as many opportunities to get out there, to realise that there is a big world out there.

(Ashcroft leadership)

The [Aboriginal] cultural programs that you have put in place for my kids ... they are just loving and embracing, [and] it's building their confidence of who they are. Also learning about their culture too. Yeah, it just, it's been beautiful to see.

(Ashcroft parent)

Mirrung supported the introduction of enrichment and engagement activities at Ashcroft Public School in 2023 after community consultations highlighted that parents and children really wanted the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities, but found them too hard to access in the Ashcroft area and unaffordable for many families.

Mirrung's goal is to offer an accessible extra-curricular enrichment program which is:

- diverse
- valued by students.

Mirrung also seeks to build agency amongst the students – to give students voice in the design of the extra-curricular program, and more generally regarding school decisions.

Students access diverse enrichment activities

In 2025, Ashcroft Public School offered a diverse range of enrichment activities, including for example, Pacific Islander dance, ukelele, bracelet making, painting, soccer, basketball and boardgames.

	2023	2024	2025
# Programs	20	23	23
# Enrolments	451	510	507

The NSW Public School Survey provides an overview of the proportion of students who take part in extra-curricular activities.

NSW Public Schools Survey results			
	Ashcroft Public School	Similar schools	NSW primary schools
% of students who took part in extra-curricular activities this year	55%	45%	47%
% of students who said that extra-curricular activities were not accessible to them	2%	13%	13%

Of the parents/carers who completed the Mirrung survey, 98% reported that their child can access extra-curricular activities through the school¹⁷ (compared to 93% in the 2025 survey).

Several parents commented that extracurricular activities would otherwise be unaffordable and therefore inaccessible to their children. One parent reported that they would need to weigh up the cost of activities against their electricity bill but that at Ashcroft ‘if they do soccer at school on Monday, dance on Wednesday, they’re doing different things and they get to pick what they like at the end of it all and it’s free’. Another parent expressed appreciation that the school covered the cost of costumes and travel to a performance, saying that she would not have been able to afford this cost, and that ‘the fact that that’s covered and they were able to still be included was great’.

If you have trouble paying, they’ll try to make sure that you don’t miss out. So you’ll go and then you’ll pay after or they’ll help you with the payment.

(Ashcroft student)

Teachers also noted the importance of enrichment activities and excursions, particularly for some children who had few opportunities to travel outside the local area.

Parents and students value enrichment activities

Both parents and students reported that they value the enrichment activities provided at school. Students reported that they ‘really like’ that Ashcroft Public School ‘gives us multiple things to do after school ... so that everyone can do enough sport’.

Parents and carers reported that they highly value the Aboriginal cultural programs provided at the school, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. One family with Aboriginal heritage commented on how important it has been for their children to learn about their culture as their family’s connection to culture has been disrupted.

Students have a voice

Mirrung is committed to engaging with students about what initiatives they would like to see at Ashcroft Public School. The NSW Public School Survey provides an indication of student’s perceptions about whether their views are listened to at Ashcroft Public School. Of the students surveyed:

- 94% said that the school cares about student opinions (compared to 69% for similar schools and 70% for NSW primary schools)
- 92% said that the school acts on student feedback (compared to 57% for similar schools and 58% for NSW primary schools).

17 September 2025 Parent/Carer Survey (77.0% strongly agree, 21.3% agree).

5.4 Family engagement

When they have events like the music show or the art show, there's a huge number of families that come to those events now and that's different to what it was like before.

(Ashcroft parent)

The family events, the numbers are full house, a music concert or the art exhibition ... I would say it's nearly a hundred percent. Every child has a representative. The music concert was beyond standing room only.

(Ashcroft leadership)

The family involvement in the school community is amazing. Getting parent helpers or allowing them to come into the school for different events and workshops is great. There's a sense of community and belonging here and I think that a big part of that is because of what Mirrung does for the community.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Family engagement is a critical sign of a thriving school community and is a key element of the Mirrung approach. Positive engagement with families builds trust between families and the school, leading to enhanced participation in school events. And enhanced family participation at school can support both a sense of safety and engagement for students and build a sense of community. Mirrung aims to support these family engagement outcomes:

- more parents/carers attend school events; volunteer at school; and take up adult learning opportunities
- parents/carers influence Mirrung planning and design.

More parents and carers participate

We run an assembly every Friday for attendance and just the numbers, the volume of parents that are turning up for that. Events in general, whenever there is a school event, we're getting more bums on seats and that's through the connections that have been made through Mirrung and the little courses that they're running, the afternoon clubs, all those little things. They all tie in together to make us stronger.

(Ashcroft leadership)

One of the clearest indicators of Mirrung's impact in its third year of operation is the extent of family engagement, which has built year on year since Mirrung's establishment. Teachers and parents spoke of 'standing room only' assemblies and 'packed houses' for special events.





All parents surveyed about the impact of Mirrung said that they feel welcome when they visit the school, and that the Ashcroft Public School teachers and staff are approachable and friendly.

Reflecting on the change in parent attendance at events, Ashcroft Public School leadership reported that in the past they may have had four or five parents attend an assembly, but that now hundreds attend. School staff all reported excellent attendance at school-wide events, and teachers reported that the majority of parents now come to three-way interviews (students, parents and teachers), in stark contrast to the level of attendance a few years ago.

In 2025 Mirrung initiated the 'Fathering Project', organising monthly events specifically targeted at engaging fathers and other men involved in children's lives. Parents and students reported very positively on these events. One mother reported that the 'Fathering' events gave her children's father a reason to come to school and that her children felt a sense of pride. She said that 'if the school didn't put that on, he wouldn't have come ... it kept him engaged'.

Families can develop skills and volunteer at school

Ashcroft Public is an amazing school as it helps us parents with courses. It makes kids feel good about going to school.

(Ashcroft parent)

We do more things with the [other] parents now. Yeah. We get more involved, we get to know each other better.

(Ashcroft parent)

We even now have parents coming in to support guided reading and parent helpers, which is so common for some of the schools that we went to for our education. But it just wasn't something here.

(Ashcroft teacher)

Mirrung also offers parents a range of engagement and learning opportunities, which in 2025 included activities such as flower arranging, laptop skills, an art workshop, parenting programs, Zumba classes, Arabic story time for families with preschool aged children, and a parent-led art and craft program, 'Masterpiece Mondays'. One parent reported about Masterpiece Mondays that she 'gets excited every week looking at what's coming up' and that her 'mum who lives up the road, she wants to come some days'.

Parents and carers continue to volunteer at Ashcroft Public School. Parents talked of volunteering in classrooms to support children's learning, and parents have participated in activities such as cooking for Reconciliation Day and supporting a morning tea for new Kindergarten parents.

Parents and carers influence Mirrung

Mirrung seeks to engage with parents and carers about Mirrung planning and design. All parents and carers who responded to the Mirrung survey reported that the school 'listens to my ideas about what families and children need to be happy and healthy'.

Mirrung also held a governance meeting in Term 2, attended by eight parents and carers, and over 20 parents and carers participated in the 2025 Mirrung evaluation.

6 About this impact assessment

This assessment of Mirrung's impact was conducted in September 2025. It involved assessing how Mirrung has contributed to change for the children and families of Ashcroft Public School.

The impact assessment 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
 - bespoke surveys of parents/carers (61 respondents) and teachers (30 respondents) about their experience of Mirrung

- focus groups with:
 - parents/carers, including a First Nations group and a general group
 - teachers and support staff
 - a group of students from Years 4-6
- 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.

