

Strategic Improvement Plan 2021-2024

Illawarra Environmental Education Centre 5743



School vision and context

School vision statement

Illawarra EEC leads schools in environmental education through targeted curriculum support and innovative learning engagement strategies. We strive for students to understand human impacts on the environment and to develop a deep connection with the natural world that inspires the custodianship needed to protect it.

Environmental and Zoo Education Centres (EZEC): Leading environmental education for a sustainable future

School context

Illawarra EEC is one of 25 NSW DoE Environmental and Zoo Education Centres (EZECs) in NSW - leaders in environmental and sustainability education.

Our excursion **sites** are located on the Illawarra coastline - amongst marine, estuarine, rainforest and forest environments. The natural beauty and environmental vulnerability of our excursion sites play an integral role in instilling in students a sense of custodianship for the environment which is crucial in order to ensure a sustainable future.

Our **students** are K-12 NSW Public School children from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures. IEEC values and seeks feedback from all students we interact with, demonstrating our commitment to students and the need for continuous improvement.

Our **programs** provide inquiry-based curriculum learning experiences that enable students to explore, investigate and understand the natural environments and the impact humans have on environmental systems.

Our **staff** endeavour to engage students in their learning, using outdoor learning pedagogical approaches that encourage students to connect with the natural world.

IEEC recognises our **dependence** on classroom teachers for the extent of our influence to be realised. We seek and value collaboration with teachers and student feedback to provide the best opportunities possible for students.

Strategic Direction 1: Optimising student learning and engagement through enhanced curriculum support

Purpose

In order to optimise student learning and engagement, the IEEC will improve its collaborative processes between centre staff and classroom teachers to ensure continuity of learning beyond the IEEC excursion experience.

Improvement measures

Target year: 2024

Domain: Teaching, **Element:** Learning and Development

Focus theme of **Collaborative practice and feedback** is further developed and maintained at *Excelling*

20 of the 98 schools (20%) in our networks have participated in IEEC's curriculum learning alliance by actively contributing to the design, refinement and delivery of learning resources and assessments which relate to IEEC's excursion experiences and fieldwork.

Target year: 2024

Domain: Leading, **Element:** School planning, implementation and monitoring

Focus theme of **Continuous improvement** is further developed and maintained at *Excelling*.

6% rise (from 4.4 to 4.7) in the average rank students and teachers place IEEC teachers in the extremely high category for 'quality and engagement' as measured by the IEEC feedback survey.

60% increase in teachers involved in an IEEC excursion actively using our teaching and learning support provided.

20% uplift in the percentage of (high school) students ranking IEEC extremely high in the excursion experience enhancing their understanding of the subject area.

Initiatives

Enhanced resource support to teachers

Use IEEC's specialist curriculum expertise and innovative approaches to enhance teachers' understanding and delivery of teaching and learning programs in targeted syllabus areas. We will achieve this by:

- Researching, implementing and evaluating ways of working in collaboration with teachers to effectively design learning experiences for students that positions the IEEC's work as an essential part of the unit of study, not just a stand alone experience
- Utilising ICT tools such as Google Sites to create and share units of work, assessment tasks, learning sequences, investigative and/or depth studies and virtual fieldwork in support of the excursion experience
- Implementing a structured cycle of review of the IEEC's excursion programs, to ensure they are inquiry based, student centred, align to the curriculum and meet the identified needs of teachers and students
- Enhancing IEEC leadership capability through identifying and solving areas of need in curriculum delivery as part of an ongoing process of implementation and improvement

Success criteria for this strategic direction

- IEEC teaching and learning programs are enhanced by collaboration with teams of teachers to ensure continued challenge and maximum learning in the units of study.
- IEEC staff use school based teachers in the planning of learning experiences and assessment tasks to ensure all students are challenged and that the programs offered are responsive in meeting the needs of all students
- Assessment criteria identified by IEEC staff as parts of the unit of work, are routinely used by teachers as evidence of learning and are used to provide students with feedback on their learning.
- Connections are strengthened between IEEC staff and classroom teachers, establishing a professional learning community which is focused on continuous improvement of teaching and learning in relation to the Centre's focus

Evaluation plan for this strategic direction

Question

To what extent has the refinement of support materials and enhanced collaborative processes between IEEC staff and classroom teachers helped to ensure continuity of learning beyond the IEEC excursion experience?

Data

- IEEC survey
- Student and teacher post program survey data
- Targeted focus group data from regular teachers who can provide anecdotal evidence of student learning and engagement before and after our enhanced resources were used.
- Student samples of work (assessment samples)

Analysis

Evaluation plan for this strategic direction

Analysis will be embedded through implementation and progress monitoring. Regular review of these data sources will provide clarity on whether the IEEC are on track for achieving the intended Improvement Measures, with regular review of School Excellence Framework elements and themes directing discussions. The IEEC will review progress towards the improvement measures term by term by triangulating and reviewing data sources including quantitative and qualitative, internal and external data to corroborate conclusions and to measure impact against the annual progress measures.

Implications

The findings of the analysis will inform:

- Future actions and directions of the strategic direction to guide continuous improvement
- Effective resourcing
- Ongoing implementation and progress monitoring
- Annual reporting

Strategic Direction 2: Leading innovations in student engagement

Purpose

In order to instill a sense of environmental custodianship amongst students, IEEC will extend its pedagogical influence by developing authentic, environmental inquiries that engage and connect students to the natural world and by delivering professional learning and sharing offerings to teachers on outdoor learning pedagogies.

Improvement measures

Target year: 2024

Domain: Teaching, **Element:** Learning and Development

Focus theme of **Expertise and innovation** is further developed and maintained at *Excelling*.

Rise in the average rank students and teachers place IEEC teachers in the extremely high category for 'quality and engagement' as measured by the IEEC feedback survey.

90% of classroom teachers engaging with IEEC's suite of outdoor learning pedagogies report a positive impact on student engagement after adopting these pedagogies into their teaching practice.

Target year: 2024

Domain: Learning, **Element:** Wellbeing

Focus theme of **A planned approach to wellbeing** is further developed and maintained at *Sustaining and Growing*

20% increase in students, following participation in an IEEC inquiry based conservation education program, reporting a feeling of custodianship of the natural world and an understanding of the processes needed to protect it.

Target year: 2024

Domain: Leading, **Element:** Educational Leadership

Initiatives

'Learning in nature' - outdoor learning pedagogies

Position IEEC as leaders in outdoor learning pedagogical practices and encourage teachers to adopt approaches that engage student learning through deep connections with the natural world. We will achieve this by:

- Researching outdoor teaching pedagogies (such as outdoor learning, outdoor recreation, nature based learning, nature play, unstructured play and environmental education) with a view to develop an agreed and suitable approach.
- Creating a tailored 'outdoor learning pedagogies' product unique to the aspirations of the IEEC and one which is responsive to the identified learning needs of classroom teachers.
- Building and sharing pedagogical capacity by participating in collaborative teacher observation sharing throughout our local community (EZEC network, visiting teachers and amongst IEEC staff).
- Developing and delivering a suite of 'outdoor learning pedagogies' professional learning opportunities for teachers such as a website repository, teacher professional learning course and sharing conference.
- Conducting an evaluation on the benefits of learning in nature for both students and the teachers who are delivering the outdoor learning pedagogies.

Inquiry based conservation education

Provide opportunities for students to engage in authentic, conservation education inquiry that allows connection, understanding and action towards locally threatened species and environments. We will achieve this by:

- Establishing a network of industry-based project partners to co-contribute to school projects with community conservation outcomes.
- Developing and delivering community conservation education programs with select school cohorts in conjunction with industry based project partners, for example: Project Platypus and Project Quoll COS

Success criteria for this strategic direction

Connections are strengthened between IEEC staff and classroom teachers and the EZEC network, establishing a professional learning community which is focused on continuous improvement of teaching and learning in relation to the Centre's focus

IEEC staff are upskilled and confident in the delivery of an outdoor learning pedagogical approach which is appropriate to the IEEC setting and purpose.

Outdoor learning and associated pedagogies is routinely applied throughout schools in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven

An observed improvement in the understanding and engagement of students when participating in a teaching and learning program developed and influenced by IEEC.

IEEC leads outdoor learning pedagogies in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven by: hosting a website repository for teachers sharing outdoor learning pedagogies and associated learning programs, running regular professional learning events for local high school and primary school teachers, and by hosting an annual conference for teachers to share their successful outdoor learning practices with others.

90% of students following learning through outdoor learning pedagogies report feeling connected to the natural world and a sense of custodianship to protect it.

Evaluation plan for this strategic direction

Q. How successfully have IEEC built capacity within the staff to position the centre as leaders in outdoor learning pedagogies, influencing teachers to develop and deliver teaching approaches that increase the connection and engagement students feel with the natural world?

D.

- Self and peer observations data (QT rounds etc)
- Uptake and participation rates of professional

Strategic Direction 2: Leading innovations in student engagement

Improvement measures

Focus theme of **High expectations culture** is further developed and maintained at Excelling

85% of teachers engaging with IEEC's suite of outdoor learning pedagogies (website, TPL and sharing conference) report capacity building of their teaching practice and a consequential observed improvement in student engagement.

Initiatives

- projects, Save the Spit - weed eradication project.
- Embedding pre and post student and teacher evaluation to inform changes in values, connection, understanding and attitudes.

Evaluation plan for this strategic direction

learning community surrounding outdoor learning pedagogies (website, TPL and conference)

- Student voice data following IEEC targeted 'outdoor learning' programs: surveys describing potential changes in attitudes towards nature, level of engagement in nature and preference in learning indoors vs outdoors.
- Teacher voice data following TPL and self reflections following outdoor learning in practice

A.

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I.

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- Ongoing implementation and progress monitoring
- Annual reporting