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*Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) Early Childhood Report.*

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

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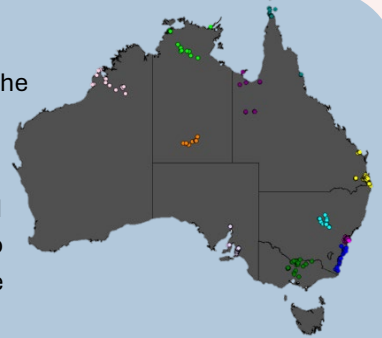
## Summary of Findings for Policymakers

# Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) - Early Childhood Report

### About the LSIC Early Childhood Report

**Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)** follows the development of over 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children throughout Australia, with data collected annually since 2008.

The **LSIC Early Childhood Report** provides information on what helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive in their early years, so they grow up strong into middle childhood and adolescence. This summary of findings from the Report can be used to inform the provision of holistic, integrated, and culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families during early childhood, to help children flourish in their early years, and beyond.



Participants' locations at study entry.

### LSIC Children's experiences varied by geographical location

Regional variations in LSIC children's experiences were evident during early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. Different opportunities and supports may be needed in different geographic locations to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow up strong.

Children residing in **remote or very remote areas** reported the highest levels of:

- participation in cultural activities
- connection to Country
- speaking an Indigenous language
- identifying with Mob.



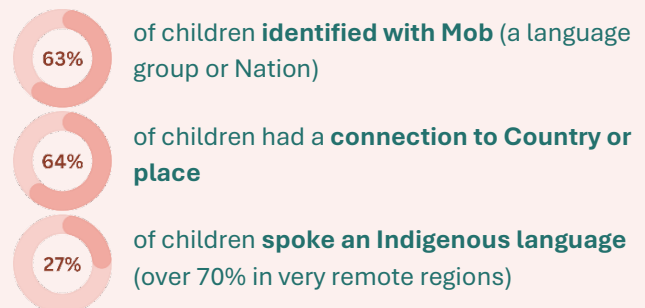
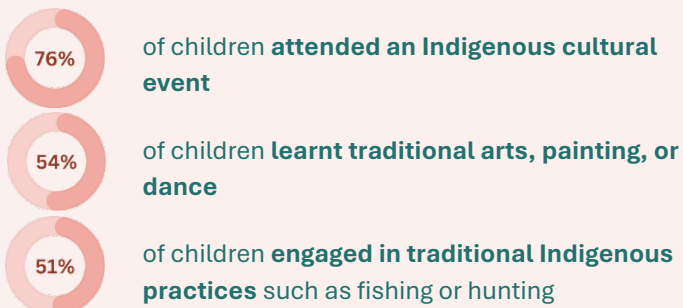
Children residing in **major cities and inner regional areas** reported the highest levels of:

- attending a playgroup prior to school
- participating in a formal preschool program in the year before school.



### Laying the early foundations for strong social-emotional wellbeing

Parents reported a variety of experiences that children had prior to starting school, which analyses showed were linked to the children having strong social-emotional wellbeing during middle childhood and adolescence. During early childhood:



**What supported stronger social-emotional wellbeing in middle childhood and adolescence?**

- Participation in cultural activities
- Connection to Country
- Speaking an Indigenous language
- Identifying with Mob

**What supported having a connection to culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit in middle childhood and adolescence?**

- Speaking an Indigenous language
- Identifying with Mob

## Supporting parental wellbeing fosters stronger child development



47% of parents consistently said they could **access advice** from family and friends in the years before their child started school

The children of these parents who could consistently access advice from family and friends prior to their child starting school (47%) were more likely than children of parents who could not (53%) to show:



Strong **classroom and emotional self-regulation skills** during the first two years of primary school



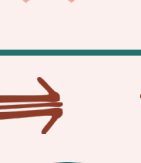
High levels of **school engagement** during the final two years of primary



Strong **academic achievement** on Year 5 and Year 9 literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN)



Strong **overall social-emotional wellbeing** during middle childhood



Strong connection during middle childhood to:

- **mind and emotions**
- **community**
- **culture, Country, Ancestors, and spirit**

Parents who reported **strong wellbeing (high resilience and low distress)** during the period prior to their child starting school were more likely to report:

- Higher **engagement in home learning activities** with their children
- Higher **confidence in their parenting**
- Higher **parental warmth**

- Lower use of **harsh discipline**

**Higher parental wellbeing** in children's early years was associated with a range of outcomes for children during early and middle childhood, and adolescence:

- Better **overall health** in the pre-school, early school, and middle school years
- Higher **expressive language and emergent literacy and writing skills** prior to school
- Better **reading comprehension skills** in early school
- Better **classroom, attentional, and emotional self-regulation skills** during the early school years
- Higher **school engagement** during middle childhood and adolescence

- Fewer **social-emotional difficulties** during middle childhood and adolescence
- Lower **psychological distress** during middle childhood and adolescence

## Bridging the digital divide in early childhood



- In 2011 and 2013, when children were in their early school years, **37%** of children were **using the internet at home**
- Internet use was highest in major cities (56%) and lowest in very remote areas (9%)

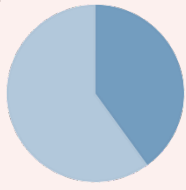


- Children were **most likely to have access to the internet** in their early school years if their **parents were educated** beyond Year 12, their family **experienced lower financial stress**, or they **resided in areas with higher socioeconomic status**



- During early childhood, children who used the internet at home had higher:
  - **Emergent literacy and writing skills**
  - **Classroom self-regulation skills**
  - **Reading comprehension skills**
- Children with early internet use at home:
  - **Felt greater confidence** using technology during middle childhood and adolescence
  - **Felt safer** using the Internet during adolescence
  - Used mobile phones for a **wider range of activities** during middle school and adolescence
  - Had **better executive functioning** during adolescence

## Pathways to stronger school engagement



40% of children attended a playgroup prior to starting school

Children who attended a playgroup (an informal gathering of children and families in community settings) prior to school had higher middle childhood school engagement than those who did not.



Children with a **close relationship to their teacher** in the early school years were more likely to stay engaged in school. Children with **higher teacher conflict** were less likely to maintain engagement in middle childhood and adolescence.

Attending a playgroup

Stronger self-regulation skills

Stronger middle childhood school engagement

Higher **attentional self-regulation** (e.g., staying focused on tasks) and **classroom self-regulation** (e.g., working independently, persisting with tasks) in the early school years were both associated with **increased school engagement** during middle childhood and adolescence.



## Pathways to stronger middle childhood academic achievement

The Report examined factors during early childhood that were involved in pathways to stronger **academic achievement** in Year 5, as measured by NAPLAN reading and numeracy. Here's what was found:



### Early learning experiences:

- Participating in a playgroup and attending a preschool program supported children's **expressive vocabulary development**
- Stronger **expressive vocabulary** was linked to:
  - Better **emergent literacy and writing skills** prior to starting school
  - Improved **reading and numeracy** in middle childhood
  - Enhanced **classroom self-regulation**, which further supported academic achievement

### Influences on learning skills prior to school:

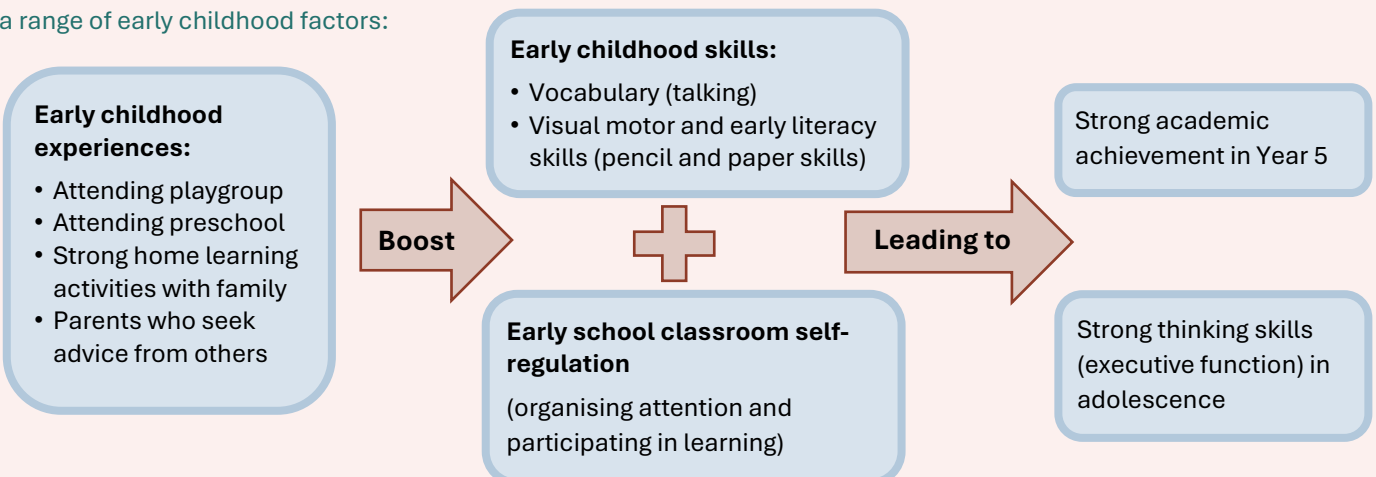
- Higher levels of **home learning activities** and **parenting social support** positively influenced children's skills
- Higher **family socioeconomic position** was linked to:
  - Stronger **early literacy skills** prior to school
  - Better **academic achievement** in middle childhood

### Environmental factors:

- **Larger households** were linked to lower **reading skills**
- **Living in remote areas** was linked to lower **expressive vocabulary** and overall **academic achievement**

## Pathways to stronger adolescent thinking skills and academic achievement

The Report explored early childhood factors that were linked to **academic achievement** and **executive functioning** (key cognitive skills like attention, memory, and planning) measured in adolescence. These thinking skills are vital for **lifelong learning, wellbeing, and employment**. Stronger academic achievement and executive functioning was associated with a range of early childhood factors:



## Growing up strong in children's own words

Wiradjuri researcher Jessa Rogers used children's own words to craft poems expressing their voices on growing up strong:

*When you are older you are brave and smart.  
Growing up mentally strong and get through any problem in life.  
Having a well supported family, having good mates,  
Being confident, knowing what to do and help people,  
I think it means to be strong in life.*

*Being healthy and making good decisions,  
Growing up healthy with a strong mind.  
Good relationships. Confident, independent, and reliable.*

*Respect my Elders and culture,  
Being kind hearted, helping and looking after people.  
Getting a good education, keep growing strong.  
Being resilient and persistent. Getting better at something.*

*You have learnt how to be a good person and be safe. Strong and brave.*

## Connections with family and kin

Drawings of their families completed by LSIC children during early childhood highlight strong and extended family and kinship networks. Children depicted parents, siblings, Elders, aunts, uncles, community members, and sometimes their house and pets.



## Recommendations from the LSIC Early Childhood Report

### Early childhood care and education services

- Prioritise and embed opportunities for cultural learning, celebration, and engagement, including arts and dance, and Indigenous language learning
- Use evidence-based strategies to promote early self-regulation skills, and prioritise oral language skills and emergent literacy and writing skills to build a strong foundation for learning and school success

### Schools and educators

- Promote positive student-teacher relationships and reduce student-teacher conflict
- Develop, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, school-based initiatives for fostering positive ethno-racial identity and belonging in classrooms

### Educational policy

- Further embed the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices by expanding professional learning in these areas and increasing the Indigenous early childhood education and care, and school workforces
- Increase access to Indigenous language programs within early childhood education and care services and schools
- Ensure all children have access to high-quality preschool programs in the year before formal schooling, particularly outside urban areas

### Community resources

- Create resources and community spaces, especially in urban areas (where connections are not as common), to help families support children's connection to culture, language, Country, and Mob. For example, by providing cultural events and activities (e.g., traditional arts) run by community organisations or early learning centres
- Expand Indigenous Language and Arts programs to support the integration of Indigenous languages
- Broaden availability of culturally responsive playgroups and family support groups to build parents' self-efficacy and social capital to support children's early development

**Please see the full Report for detail on the study findings:** Rogers J, Ekberg S, Ritchie T, Carpendale EJ, Williams KE, Berthelsen D, Piltz LM, & Laurens KR (2025) *Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) Early Childhood Report*. Queensland University of Technology. <https://doi.org.10.5204/rep.eprints.259312>

