

What works best: 2020 update

Overview for parents and carers of primary and secondary school students

NSW public schools are committed to ensuring that how we teach your child is based on what we know makes the biggest difference to their learning.

In March this year, the NSW Department of Education released an update of some of the most significant research into effective teaching. This report is called 'What works best: 2020 update' and outlines eight evidence-based practices that teachers can use in their classrooms to support improved student learning. It is likely that the 'What works best: 2020 update' will inform the teaching and learning in your child's school.

Below is a summary of the eight 'What works best' practices for effective teaching, including some conversation tips to help you support these practices at home. We suggest that you use just one set of questions at a time with your child.

You can find the 'What works best: 2020 update' publication, together with other evidence-based resources for schools, at education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/educational-data/what-works-best-2020-update

1. High expectations

Students learn best when teachers have high expectations. Having high expectations means that teachers work hard to gain students' interest, encourage them to learn new things, provide help when they need it, are clear and consistent about how they want students to behave and learn, and vary the way they teach to meet students' needs.

Check in with your child

- For primary school students: Did you try something new today? What was it? How did you go? How do you feel when you're learning something new?
- For secondary school students: When you are asked to do something in class, how do you know what standard of work the teacher expects?

2. Explicit teaching

Students learn best when teaching is explicit, especially when learning something new. Explicit teaching involves teachers clearly explaining to students why they are learning something, how it connects to what they already know, what they expect students to do, how to do it and what it looks like when they have succeeded.

Check in with your child

- For primary and secondary school students: Tell me about something you learnt today. Did you find it easy to learn, or did you need to ask a few questions? How could you tell when you 'got it'?

3. Effective feedback

Students learn best when teachers provide them with effective feedback. Feedback that is effective is constructive, detailed and specific. It focuses on how students performed on a particular task, and is clear about where mistakes were made and what needs to happen to improve in future.

Check in with your child

- For primary and secondary school students: When you're learning something new, how do you know if you're on the right track? How do you know what you can do to improve next time?



4. Use of data to inform practice

Students learn best when teachers use data to confirm where students are up to in their learning and to plan what to teach next. Data is any form of information that helps teachers to do this. Data can come from a range of places, including class quizzes, student answers to teacher questions, samples of students' work and formal exams.

5. Assessment

Students learn best when teachers use high quality assessment. Assessment refers to the range of activities that teachers use to evaluate where students are up to in their learning. It includes formal activities such as exams and surveys, as well as more informal activities such as asking students questions and evaluating samples of their work.

Check in with your child

- For primary school students: How do you show your teacher what you know and what you can do?
- For secondary school students: Your teacher needs to understand where you are up to in your learning, so that they know what to teach next. How do you show your teacher what you know and what you can do?

6. Classroom management

Students learn best when teachers manage their classrooms well. Classroom management includes the broad range of things that teachers do to encourage a safe, positive and stimulating learning environment for their students.

Check in with your child

- For primary school students: Are there rules or expectations you need to follow in your classroom? Can you tell me a few? What happens when you work hard to follow them? What happens if you don't follow them?
- For secondary school students: Does your school have school or classroom rules or expectations? Can you name a few? What happens when students follow them? What happens if students don't follow them?

7. Wellbeing

Students learn best when they have a high level of wellbeing. Student wellbeing is a broad term that includes good mental, physical and emotional health, feeling supported in learning, building healthy relationships and having a strong sense of meaning and purpose. Teachers can support students' wellbeing by:

- creating a safe environment
- helping students to feel that they belong
- valuing their opinions and perspectives
- encouraging them to be interested in learning
- helping them to manage their emotions
- helping them to develop positive relationships with teachers and other students.

Check in with your child

- For primary and secondary school students: How do you feel about school at the moment? Are there things that you find hard or challenging? Do you know what to do or who you can speak to if you're having a bad day or have a problem? Does someone look out for you at school?



8. Collaboration

Students learn best when teachers collaborate. Collaboration involves teachers working together with other teachers and experts from outside the school to improve their teaching. Effective collaboration is likely to include teachers planning lessons and teaching programs together, observing each other's lessons and giving feedback, and discussing and thinking about issues related to their work.

For example ...

High expectations at Aldavilla Public School

Aldavilla Public School attributes much of its success in improving outcomes for students to a focus on high expectations. The students are constantly reminded that they can be whatever they want to be. One way that high expectations are encouraged at Aldavilla Public School is through setting goals. Students are expected to be working towards learning goals that are achievable, and staff are constantly encouraging students to push themselves to reach their next goal.

The school also encourages high expectations by taking a whole-school approach. For example, every class follows exactly the same behaviour management system. Student-teacher relationships are also a priority. All teachers make an effort to get to know students and show that they care about them. This can be achieved by doing things as simple as asking what students did on the weekend, or knowing who a student's brothers and sisters are.

For example ...

Use of data to inform practice at Concord High School

The mathematics faculty at Concord High School studies their HSC data each year and uses the results to plan their teaching programs in Years 7-11. The head teacher of mathematics explains: "We have a really good look at the questions students got wrong and we try to re-program based on things that the kids have got wrong. For example, our students were struggling with 'significant figures' in the HSC so we've now brought significant figures into Year 7. That means they have six years where they can see that they can round to significant figures, and now it hasn't been an issue."

Sometimes the re-programming involves changing the order of topics during the year so that students have more opportunities to apply their knowledge and understanding of these concepts throughout the year. The head teacher of mathematics continues: "Our students were doing really badly with probability. We had a look at our programs and probability was something we were doing at the end of every year, so we've moved it around a little bit so they are seeing it earlier in some years."