

**QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STATEMENT**

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this statement is to articulate The Nature School’s (TNS) approach to teaching and learning in the Primary years. TNS strives to have skilled, effective and professional teachers who are committed to improving the quality of their teaching in order to enhance student learning.

1. **Context**

*At TNS Primary our vision is to create a community where children learn and shine through authentic experiences in nature, becoming active global citizens for a sustainable future.*

TNS Primary strives to be a leading progressive independent school with a focus on nature. After opening initially for children across K-2 in 2018, the strategic plan is to continue adding grade levels and additional staff until we reach a full K-6 Primary School in 2022. TNS seeks to employ highly qualified, experienced teachers whose educational philosophy and life experiences align with the vision articulated by the Board. While it is not essential that teachers have had professional experience in a progressive environment, a willingness to learn and an understanding of the educational philosophies outlined below are essential.

1. **Educational philosophies**

Teachers are expected to be familiar with the following key education philosophies outlined in the prospectus, and summarised below:

* 1. **Innovative education**

TNS offers innovative education which uses an experiential, learner led approach with a ‘green focus’. There will be a de-emphasis on textbooks in favour of varied learning resources. Classes will have a high teacher-student ratio that will allow us to focus on the needs of the students as individuals. Creativity, problem solving, independent thinking, communication and collaboration will be encouraged and fostered. TNS will have strong community involvement and engage experts in various fields from our community. Parents, carers and families are also encouraged to be active participants in the school. Students will be given opportunities to explore through regular Adventure Days and other excursions.

TNS will graduate the doers, makers and cutting-edge thinkers the world needs. Teachers will encourage students to take risks, make mistakes, persist, think outside the box, assess situations from different perspectives and work cooperatively. The School will value children’s individual talents, foster respectful adult/child communication, provide a creative and challenging learning journey for children, have no religious affiliation, and support children’s connection with nature.

* 1. **Connection to the Natural Environment**

The natural environment provides opportunities for challenge and experiential learning. Nature based education supports a child’s development in social and emotional intelligence, problem solving and environmental understanding. In a world overloaded with virtual distractions, TNS students will be given time and space to come down to earth and engage with the natural world. Nature offers children the chance to learn about themselves and the world around them and builds emotional resilience they can use throughout life. Connection to nature and our environment allows us to teach the importance of our collective eco-footprint and the hope of creating respectful custodianship.

* 1. **Inquiry based learning**

Inquiry based learning is facilitated by teachers who pose questions, problems or scenarios, rather than simply presenting established facts or portraying a smooth path to knowledge. At TNS, inquiry-based learning:

* blends school-based learning with outside experiences in order to heighten students’ interest and curiosity
* focuses on studying science through real world experiments
* emphasises learning by doing – often outside (hands on projects, expeditionary learning, experiential learning)
* encourages group work, collaborative and cooperative learning projects and the associated development of social skills
* will regularly be multi-aged
  1. **Indigenous and cultural learning**

TNS seek to foster relationships with local Birpai Elders and focus on local Indigenous knowledge and language. Students will learn about the history of places through visiting elders of other cultures and invite cultural facilitators to teach their stories to our students.

* 1. **Place-based education**

At TNS we take advantage of our stunning location through immersive learning in the community and natural environment to create authentic, meaningful and engaging personalised learning for students. Through place-based education (PBE) we seek to engage students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and connect these with learning outcomes across the curriculum.

1. **Quality of Teaching**

The Head Teacher is responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching within the School. Teaching programs (including assessments), timetables, and reports are reviewed by the Head Teacher on a termly basis and written feedback is provided. The Head Teacher functions as a mentor for teachers and may coach less experienced staff members or observe colleagues to provide feedback on a specific area of teaching practice, in line with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). At TNS we acknowledge that teachers are learners too, and teaching staff are expected to consistently demonstrate and share their own learning.

If any teacher at TNS is deemed in need of support to improve an aspect of their teaching practice, the Head Teacher will assume a coach or mentor role and use a range of targeted strategies to set clear goals and monitor progress.

1. **Professional Learning**

All teachers at TNS must be accredited with NESA. Conditionally or Provisionally registered teachers must diligently work towards achieving Proficient status within the required time frame. The Association of Independent Schools (AISNSW) functions as our Teacher Accreditation authority (TAA) and provides substantial support in this area. Proficient teachers in the maintenance cycle must continue to demonstrate and document their practice against the seven standards of the APST.

There is a strong focus on the professional learning of all staff at TNS, and continuous engagement with informal and formal professional development opportunities is expected. In consultation with the Head Teacher, teaching staff are required to set professional learning goals that are connected to the APST and aligned with the School’s philosophy. Professional development days for staff are scheduled throughout the year. At the first Professional Development day in the academic year, new staff will participate in an induction program as part of their learning. Weekly meetings provide an ongoing opportunity for collegial conversations, and for the Head Teacher to meet with collaboratively or individually with staff members.

1. **Curriculum and Programming**

Teachers at TNS are expected to have deep curriculum knowledge and be familiar with NSW syllabus documents in all Key Learning Areas, including an understanding of the cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities, in addition to relevant Stage outcomes. This depth of understanding equips teachers to write high quality programs, while allowing opportunities to connect child-led learning back to the curriculum. It also enables teachers to connect learning outcomes from different KLAs into Integrated programs at times. Teachers at TNS are expected to document both planned and unplanned learning experiences.

The Head Teacher has oversight of the yearly overview, KLA percentages, scope and sequence documents, term overviews, assessment plans, and programs. Teachers are provided with a planning template and guidelines for programming. A similar structure may also be used in Program Builder. Assessment for, as and of learning should be embedded throughout programs. Evidence of learning, which may take a variety of forms, should be collated and documented.

1. **Staff Expectations**

Staff are expected to:

* read and be familiar with TNS approach as outlined in the School prospectus
* arrive at least 30mins before doors open to students to prepare for teaching and learning (8:10am)
* remain after school for at least 30mins after student supervision ends to mark student work, reflect on teaching and plan for learning (3:50pm)
* participate in weekly staff meetings (Wednesday afternoons)
* participate in and contribute to weekly professional learning meetings (Thursday afternoons)
* see themselves as learners
* be highly reflective practitioners
* be aware of the ‘hidden curriculum’ that often exists in schools
* regularly take learning outside of the traditional classroom walls
* experiment with teaching strategies and be willing to try new approaches
* independently undertake professional reading around progressive education, nature pedagogy, bush/forest schools, etc
* actively look for opportunities to connect the curriculum
* produce strong, succinct programs that cover required learning outcomes without unnecessary over-programming
* look for authentic assessment opportunities over ‘tests’
* provide differentiation for support and extension in all programs
* make adjustments as necessary to ensure access to learning for all students ‘on the same basis’
* trust students with shaping their own learning path and guide them towards accepting responsibility for their learning
* respect children’s voices
* annotate and evaluate all teaching programs
* use feedback provided to improve teaching

1. **Staff Appraisals**

The Head Teacher is responsible for the annual appraisal of staff, and the appraisal of any staff member on a probation period. Appraisals involve both written reflections and collegial discussion. Teaching staff are expected to use the APST to critically reflect on their practice before the appraisal and set new professional learning goals.