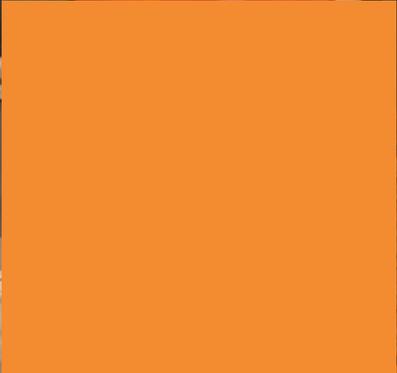




# Parallel Lines: Community languages schools and their role in **growing languages** and **building communities**



Ken Cruickshank  
Yong Moon Jung and Emily Bai Li



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# Executive **summary**

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More than 30 per cent of families in NSW – 60 per cent in inner city Sydney – have home languages in addition to English (ABS, 2020). Faced with the challenge of passing cultural skills and knowledge onto their children when these languages are not available, or not taught sufficiently, in mainstream schools, parents and communities have been motivated to establish after-hours community languages (CL) schools. CL schools are the sole providers of more than 30 languages in NSW. They are also the first to respond to emerging language needs.

**In 2019, more than 37,500 CL students were learning 62 different languages from more than 3,000 volunteer teachers in NSW.**

CL school enrolments have more than doubled since 1981, when the federal government's Ethnic Schools Program was established, and they have increased by 20 per cent since 2004 – in stark contrast to languages enrolment in mainstream schools. Of the 31 per cent of children who enter the school system with a home language in addition to English, only five per cent are studying their language by Year 12 (Cruickshank, 2020). Australia ranks near the bottom of OECD countries in the provision and uptake of languages.

**'If Australia discovered untapped oil and gas reserves, it would be considered foolish to ignore them. Yet Australia does ignore its languages resources,' said the GO8 report on languages (2007: 7).**

The title of this report, 'Parallel Lines', refers to the CL school sector's co-existence for more than 170 years with other providers of languages education in Australia – including early childhood programs, government and non-government schools, community colleges, universities and TAFE – and to the lack of collaboration between the sectors in terms of policy, planning, and provision. Despite the grassroots success of the CL school program in Australia, it remains a hidden and untapped resource.

### The key recommendation from our study:

- That CL schools be recognised as a complementary provider of languages education in NSW. Representatives should be included in policy and program planning, especially in the areas of early childhood, primary, secondary and adult education.
- That NSW Department of Education undertake a more proactive role in targeting support and development of NSW Community Languages Schools.

In the 1980s, most CL school students were born overseas (first generation or generation 1.5). Data from the 2016 Census indicates the majority are now Australian born (second, third and fourth generations). For many of them, English is the main language spoken at home. CL schools provide a 'third' or 'intercultural' space in which they can negotiate identities that differ from those imposed by mainstream schools and their own communities (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

The student population has also diversified. When the Ethnic Schools Program was introduced, 82.5 per cent of students were primary or junior-secondary school aged. Today, almost a quarter of CL schools offer preschool classes. More than 10 per cent of CL schools run classes for Year 11 and 12. There has also been a significant increase in adult enrolments: spouses in mixed-marriages, older students wanting to regain their language, and non-background learners studying for work and travel.

The challenges faced by CL school principals are complex and multi-faceted. The vast majority

(96%) of CL teachers are overseas born. Many of them don't come from an educational background. Professional learning support needs to be targeted, specific, and continuing. Pathways for teachers to NESA accreditation are essential.

Our study identified five target areas for support:

- Language-specific resources, professional development, accreditation of student learning, improved access to ICT, and access to online learning.

### Final note

This study was completed at a key moment in the history of the CL school program in NSW. The NSW Community Languages Schools Board, which played a key role in program development, is now disbanded. Many schools have shifted to online delivery in the wake of the COVID-19 shutdown. SICLE's funding runs out in 2020 and its future is uncertain. It is hoped that the gains achieved in the past two decades can continue.

**'If Australia discovered untapped oil and gas reserves, it would be considered foolish to ignore them. Yet Australia does ignore its languages resources,'**



# Context

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The aim of this study was to collect information on the organisation, administration, curriculum, and resourcing of NSW government-funded CL schools. This data would be used by the Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE) to plan and develop curriculum resources and professional learning support with funding from the NSW government.

The specific aims:

- to collate existing information about the nature and scope of complementary schools in NSW
- to collect detailed information from teachers and school leaders about their school organisation and teaching
- to identify aspects of school organisation and teaching that need support
- to identify ways in which the role of the CL sector can be consolidated.

## A review of the background literature

More than 300 international CL schools studies have been conducted over the past 20 years – journal articles, books and book chapters, reports, conference papers, and theses – compared with fewer than 20 studies in the 1990s. This indicates the growing international importance of the school sector. The key findings of a meta-analysis of recent studies are:

- CL schools provide a third or ‘intercultural’ space where students can negotiate and develop senses of identity.
- CL schools are a major sector of language education provision and are the main or sole provider for many languages.
- CL schools play a valuable role in forming and developing communities.
- There is a lack of culturally relevant teaching material suitable for CL students in countries such as Australia.
- Volunteer teachers, often migrant women with qualifications from overseas, enter the schools as a pathway to further study and career but these pathways are blocked.

CL schools rely on voluntary support from community members and benefit from government support (Cruickshank & Tsung, *submitted for publication*).



## Key issues raised by the research findings into CL school organisation include:

### The role of community schools:

- Are CL schools community organisations or educational institutions?
- What is their relationship with other education providers?

### Teachers' skills and professional learning needs:

- How can volunteer teachers best be supported?
- What pathways to accreditation can and should schools provide?

### Funding of CL schools:

The federal government began funding CL schools in 1981 but devolved responsibility to state and system level in 1992. States have dealt with the schools in different ways.

- To what extent are the schools the responsibility of state and federal governments and educational jurisdictions? And to what extent are they the responsibility of the ethnic communities themselves?
- How can their needs in terms of funding and organisation be most effectively met?

### Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment:

While many of the languages are not taught in mainstream government schools, they represent a valuable resource for both community and non-background speakers.

- Is it possible for volunteers in not-for-profit organisations to develop curriculum and pedagogy aligned with mainstream schools?
- To what extent can and should community languages school curriculum and teaching approaches be aligned with government syllabuses and mainstream schools?
- How can student learning be assessed and accredited?

These issues frame the present study.

## Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which CL schools respond to community needs; how they organise their schools, their curriculum, and teaching.

The study draws on national and NSW data for languages and CL schools, all existing reports, ABS data (2016), and NSW Department of Education data on student languages backgrounds (1998 – 2018) and CL schools (2004– 2018).

Online surveys of school leaders and teachers were conducted, focusing on curriculum, planning and assessment, funding and finances, school administration, and teaching practices.

Our key questions were as follows:

- How have changes in student enrolment patterns impacted on schools?
- What roles do CL schools play in communities and the broader society?
- What is the nature of the curriculum, teaching, and learning in schools?
- What are the organisational strengths, capacities, and requirements of CL schools?

The survey was written in plain English and had a mix of dropdown boxes and open-ended questions. We received 407 responses from which we took a final, cleaned sample of 370. There were responses from 34 different language backgrounds, and the percentages of responses reflected the percentages of teachers/ students of these language groups in CL schools.

We interviewed 28 teachers and school leaders to gain a greater understanding of the teaching practices, resources, and operational standards in the schools. We also explored their experiences of the changes in schools, students, and communities.

We also drew upon case studies of seven CL schools, which involved interviews with teachers, parents and students, as well as school and classroom observations.

# Who are the **students**?

CL school enrolments have more than doubled since 1981 and increased by 20 per cent since 2004, in stark contrast to languages enrolments in mainstream schools. During this time, there has been a marked shift in the student demographic from overseas-born (generation 1 or 1.5) students to second, third, and fourth-generation Australians. The majority of the students in the top four languages (Chinese, Greek, Vietnamese, Arabic) – and in seven of the top 10 languages – are Australian-born (ABS, 2020). English is now the main language in the home of many CL students. Some of them even communicate with their grandparents in English.

This is reflected in the growing complexity of students' language use. Codeswitching, when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, and 'translanguaging,' in which multiple languages are used simultaneously, are reported as the norm.

*When I was in Year 2, I stopped speaking all Chinese, so my Chinese got a little bit bad. My parents speak to me in Canto but I answer in English or mixed. With my brother [I] sometimes [speak] in Canto but mostly in English. CL school student*

*My mum and dad talk Arabic to each other and they talk Arabic to me. I'm not great at speaking it back to them but I do understand what they are saying. Me and my sisters we mix them both. Arabic CL school student*

Mixed marriages, where parents had different first languages, are increasingly common.

*I don't speak much Mandarin at home because I'm half. My dad's Australian so he can't understand anything. Only me and my mum. Chinese CL student*

Students' diminishing access to the community language in the home has been offset by much greater access through technology and travel.

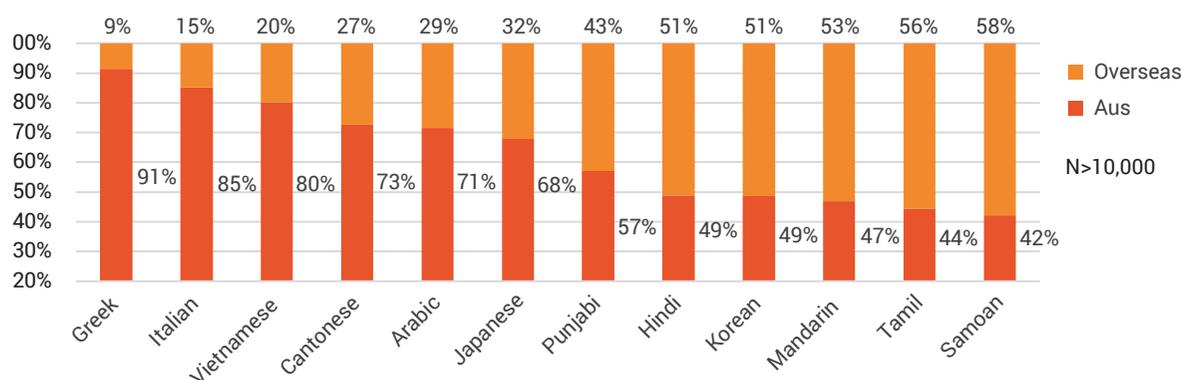


Figure 1: Proportions of Australian and Overseas Born students (5- to 18 years old) by language (source: ABS 2016 census)



We go to Lebanon every year. My jaw hurts at the end of the day from speaking Arabic. It's so much harder!

Arabic CL school student

My grandmother and half my family is in Italy. We Skype every week.

Italian CL school student

To accommodate the changing student demographic, CL schools have had to shift their goal or 'mission'.

I made a decision to focus on what we call second or third-generation Chinese. Some of the parents could not even speak Chinese. That's the reason why, over the last 10 years, ... probably about 10 to 15 per cent of our students are non-Chinese background.

CL school principal

## Language and cultural learning

The teaching of cultural understanding has always been a 'core business' but there has been a change in emphasis as CL schools shift from first to subsequent generation learners. Many interviewees spoke about the challenges and rewards of teaching bilingual and bicultural students.

To transfer all your knowledge about the [Macedonian] language, the culture, the tradition, the history ... to these children that [are] second or third generation.

CL school teacher

CL schools act as cultural centres for their communities: they run cultural events (85%), awards ceremonies (66%), family get-togethers (55%), and excursions/ camps (42%). According to our online survey, 60 per cent of schools provided classes in addition to specific language lessons. The most common additional classes were heritage/cultural understanding classes, music and dance classes and art classes.

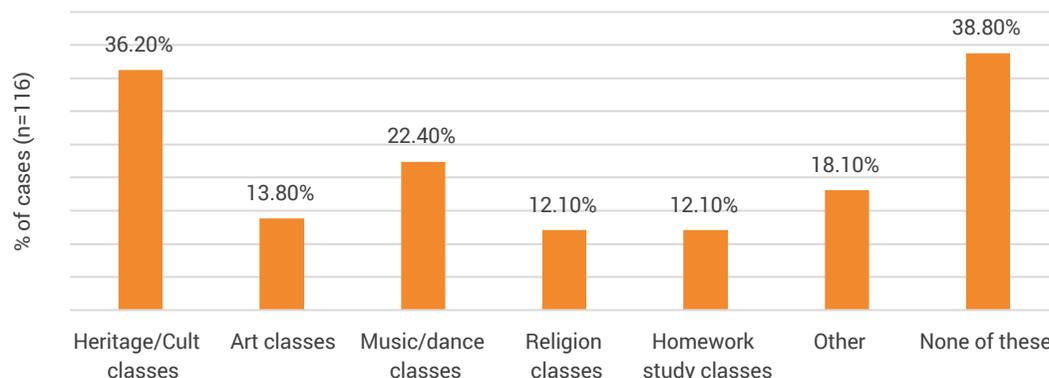


Figure 2: Other Regular Classes in CL schools

Language and cultural learning classes were seen as two aspects of the one curriculum. Many schools taught their language through art, music, and other activities. A principal of a Chinese language school, commented:

**We started up art and calligraphy for the high school beginner students. It gives them confidence. They didn't want to focus only on language but they don't realise that all the class communication is in Chinese.**

A shift in CL schools' goals is reflected in the responses to our online survey questions. Research literature documents a "community language only" rule in most schools. (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Almost 50 per cent of our respondents 'agreed' or 'sometimes agreed' (24.8% each) that 'children should only use the community language in the school' but very few principals or teachers 'strongly agreed' with the statement. Responses to our online survey indicate that teachers and principals support classroom interaction and accept that this interaction occurs in both English and the community language.

Diverse attitudes were expressed in the interviews. Despite the shift in enrolments to second, third and fourth generation students, less than five per cent of teachers were Australian born; there were many negative comments about students' biculturalism and translanguaging. However, the more common response is typified by the following comment:

**At home we use only Turkish. Of course, the kids speak English to each other, but we brought them up with us speaking Turkish to them. In the school, it's different. Many of them don't have Turkish at home and if we only used Turkish at school it would turn them off; they wouldn't come back. So we try and set up the environment where they feel confident and comfortable using Turkish. – CL school principal**

Issues of cultural identity and a sense of belonging also featured prominently in interviews. Students commonly spoke of the benefits of making and meeting friends; having a space where they could interact with others who shared their experiences, senses of identity, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds

**... people here are more like family members. – Arabic CL school student**

Teachers observed the positive results of cultural learning, even for first and generation 1.5 students.

**I find that the split personality aspect - because kids who are from a different culture, different language, although they come and settle in Australia, they always have some kind of confusion about their identity. How much am I Australian?**

**How much am I Indian? ... [Attendance at community language school] has given her answers to all the questions and confusion. She is more confident. – Hindi school teacher**

Students spoke about how that stronger sense of identity helped them to navigate between the two cultures.

**Basically, in China you don't really think for yourself. It's like you're basically being controlled by your teachers and parents. So they tell you what to do. You don't have [the] idea of self. In Australia, it's like you have more freedom but it requires a lot of self-control. So we have iPads open and you can even download games. Basically, if you play games in class no one's going to stop you. So you have to have self-control. – Chinese CL student**

## Attendance and enrolment

School-age enrolments vary according to the age of students, peaking at seven years old (14.5%). There is marked attrition between the ages of 10 and 13 due to competition with other commitments such as sport and tutoring. The drop-off in secondary school is more gradual.

The five main languages taught in CL schools comprise 69 per cent of students:

**Chinese** is the main language taught in NSW CL schools and Chinese is the main language, after English, spoken by students in NSW schools (DoE, 2019). Overall numbers in Chinese CL schools have increased by 16.5 per cent since 2004.

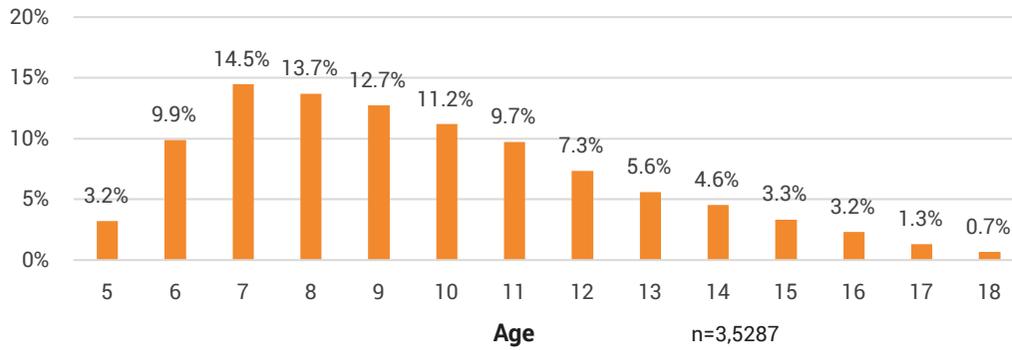


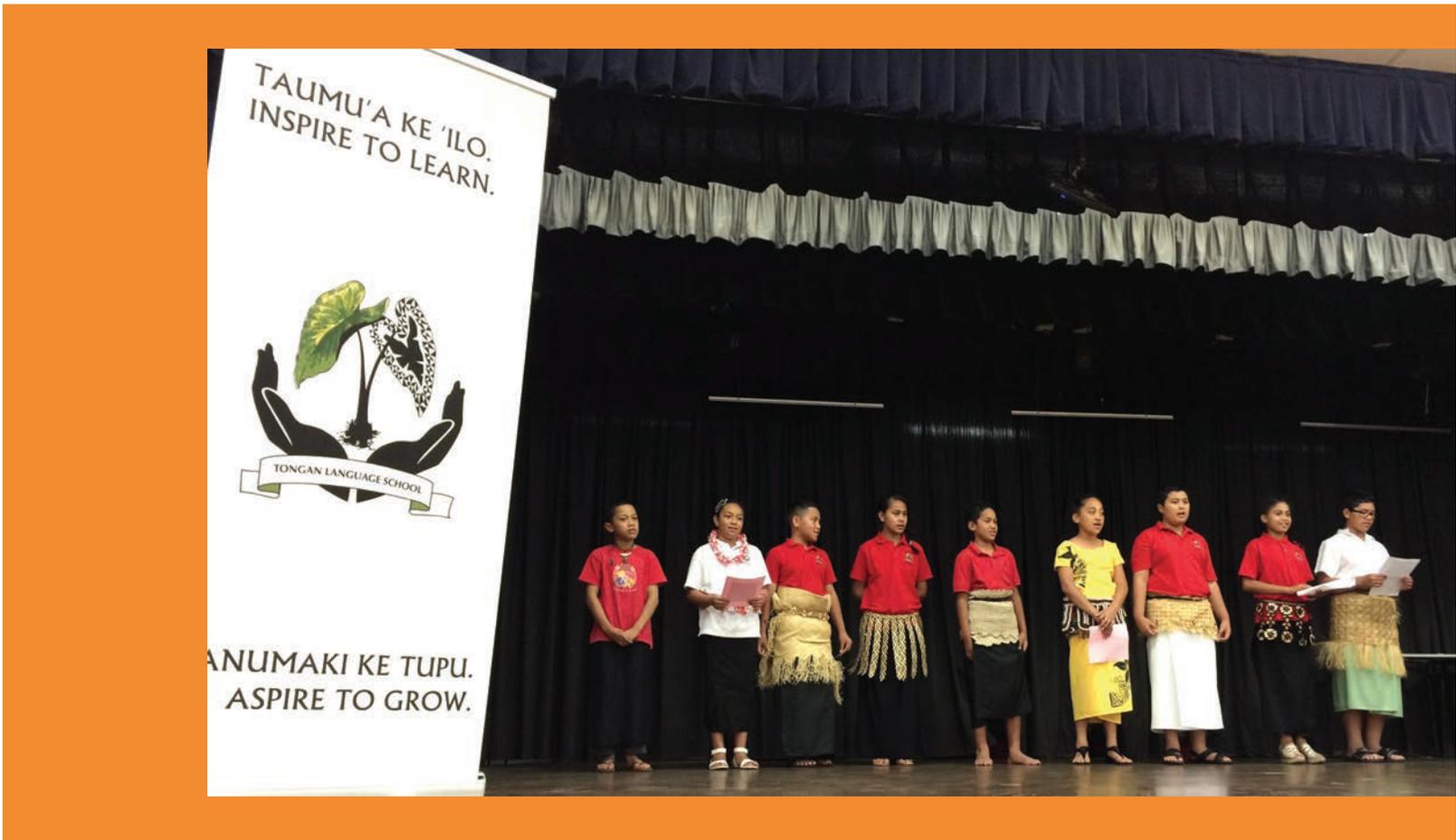
Figure 3 Percentage of student enrolment in CL schools by age (source DoE 2019)

**Arabic** is the second language, other than English, most spoken in NSW by 5- to 18-year olds and the numbers in government schools have increased by 53.9 per cent since 2004. In CL schools, however, the numbers have increased by only 19 per cent during that same period.

**Vietnamese** is a language 'at risk' in CL schools. Vietnamese is the third main language, after English, spoken by students in NSW and numbers have increased in government schools by 41.8 per cent since 2004. Enrolments in Vietnamese CL schools, however, have fallen by 32.3 per cent.

The maintenance of **Greek** is strong across the 5- to 18-year-old age group with a 91 per cent retention rate. Student enrolments have remained fairly stable, with a drop of 9.8 per cent between 2004 and 2019, which reflects the fall in students of Greek background in NSW government schools.

**Korean**, the fifth largest after English in NSW according to the 2016 census, is a fast-growing language in NSW. The language is at a crucial stage of retention. The CL school enrolment increase of 11.5 per cent compares with a population increase of 54 per cent.



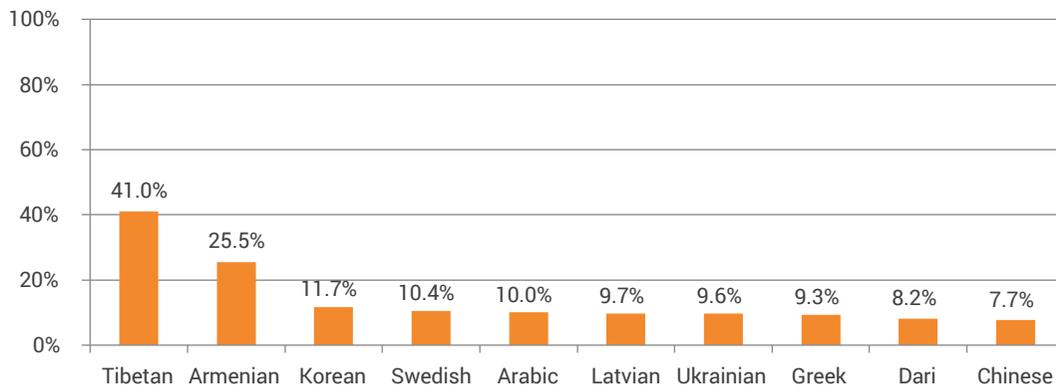


Figure 4 Top 10 CL school enrolments by language background (source: 2016 NSW DoE and ABS 5-18 years old)

There are marked differences in enrolments between language groups.

Five CL schools have more than 10 per cent of 5- to 18-year-olds from that language background in attendance: Tibetan, Armenian, Korean, Swedish and Arabic. At the Tibetan school, the enrolment rate is more than 40 per cent. The Armenian rate is more than 25 per cent. There is no single reason to explain these high enrolment figures. The Tibetan school in NSW only began in 2014. It is supported by a refugee community with a strong sense of affiliation to the language and culture and the school is well organised with textbooks, resources, and teacher professional development. The majority of students are recent arrivals.

On the other hand, Armenian is a long-standing community language and most students are second, third and fourth generation Australians. There remains, however, a strong affiliation to the language and culture; schools are well organised, and the refugee background of the community remains a uniting factor.

Korean is a more recent community but links to religious organisations are strong: most of the schools are part of church organisations. Swedish is a non-visible dispersed community. Schools in Melbourne and Sydney provide some online learning to address these issues and there is also strong attachment to language and community.

Arabic is a long-standing community language but there has also been marked increases in recent migration, especially refugee migration. There is strong affiliation with religious groups and nearly all schools identify target student groups by religion or demographic area in the Middle East. Several communities have very low attendance by students from that language background. Six languages/language groups have less than one per cent of students in attendance: Filipino, Pacific Island languages, Malay, German, Spanish, and Bosnian. The reasons for this may also be diverse. The Filipino community is dispersed and there is a majority of mixed marriages. The impact of English on Filipino and Pacific Island languages in the countries of origin has also been strong and the

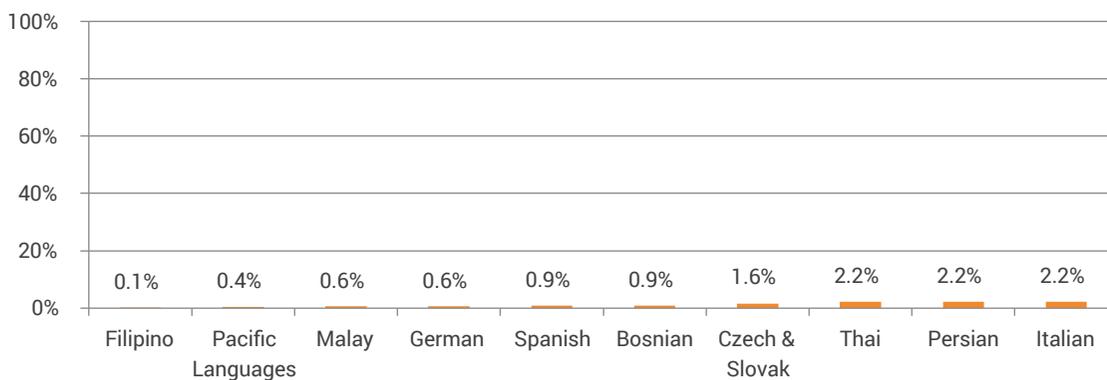


Figure 5 Lowest 10 CL school enrolments by language background (source: 2016 NSW DoE and ABS 5-18 years old)



status and usage of the community languages has been correspondingly lowered. It is interesting to note that while Persian has low attendance rates, the numbers for Dari, a dialectal variant of Persian/Farsi, are relatively high. The reasons for the diversity of attendance by language group deserves further study as it may emerge that specific language groups need much greater support in reaching out to their communities.

## Widening student enrolments

A key change across all CL schools is the expansion in the types of learners. In the 1980s, 82.5 per cent of students were primary or junior-secondary school aged; most (65%) spoke their community language in their home (Norst, 1982a). Only three per cent of students were non-background (Norst, 1982a).

Our study found that:

- 24.4 per cent of schools now offer preschool/ kindergarten classes or playgroups
- 6.5 per cent of schools run separate classes for adults
- more than 10 per cent of schools run classes for Year 11 and 12. Preschool classes were

funded through the CL Program between 1981 and 2004 but now rely on parent fees. This sector has been completely ignored in research with the exception of a recent Scottish study (Hancock & Hancock, 2018), which found that 43 per cent of community languages schools in Scotland ran classes for children under five. This indicates an urgent need for support in terms of meeting educational needs and legal requirements.

There has been a significant increase in classes for older learners: spouses in mixed-marriages, older students wanting to regain their language, and non-background adults studying for work and travel.

There has also been a marked increase in enrolments of secondary-aged students. More than 10 per cent of schools run classes for Year 11 and 12 students and 26.4 per cent of schools run classes for Years 7 to 10 students.

When non-funded learners and non-funded schools are included, the attendance at CL schools is estimated at more than 60,000 students. This broadening of the student demographic has many implications for school pedagogy, resourcing, and policy and program development.

# Teaching and learning in CL schools

**One of the themes identified in our online survey was the way teachers differentiate learning, involve students in activities, scaffold learning, and develop student ownership and autonomy. Student engagement emerged as a priority. Nearly every teacher and principal mentioned the importance of embedding games and activities into lessons to get students to use the spoken and written language. Teachers (95.4%) and principals (87%) overwhelmingly supported student interaction in learning.**

Many teachers used project work and activities to engage older students.

*Sometimes I make a vote on paper, so students choose the activities they like.*

This extended to the use of drama, role play and video.

*We have a little five-minute skit, which we do each year. We also participate in the modern language teachers' linguafest with a little video that we encourage them to make. Twice we have been finalists for that.*

Many teachers showed evidence of what is called 'designed in' and 'contingent' scaffolding (being able to adjust lessons to suit students' level).

*I like going with students' pace more than delivering what I want to deliver. I do have some plans in my mind, but I'm quite flexible about it. As a teacher, I think I should have the capacity to deliver [a topic] in a different way so that whatever I want to say gets across. It's taken willingly, not as a forced thing.*

There were more 'traditional' responses to questions about teaching alphabet/characters and vocabulary. Most teachers and principals thought 'students should learn the alphabet/ script before they learn anything else'. The majority felt that 'teachers should always correct student mistakes'. The majority of teachers (76%) and principals (62%) thought that vocabulary was the most important thing to learn in a language.

The need for training in classroom management was highest with volunteers with less than two years' experience, for those with no prior experience in education, and for those teaching in schools using more 'traditional' pedagogy. Most schools have a process for mentoring beginners. The majority of schools also organised regular teacher professional learning.

## Using technology

Most teachers strongly support the use of ICT for classroom teaching (89%) but only 39 per cent of them have access to the internet in their classrooms.

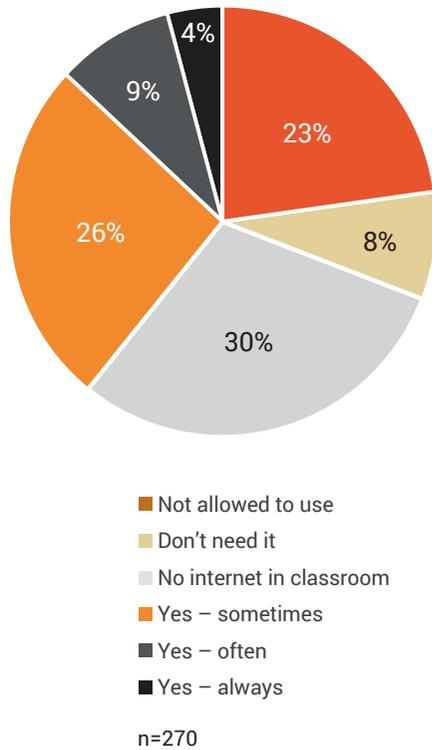


Figure 6 Access to and use of internet in classroom

Due to the lack of reliable access to the internet and smartboards, many teachers employ other forms of technology (32.4 per cent use iphones, 21.5 per cent use ipads and 8.3 per cent use tablets). Teachers bring in their own technology, or in some cases schools provide equipment.

A large number of CL schools have their own website to promote the school and keep in touch with their community. Others use tools such as Weichat and WhatsApp.

Teacher professional learning in using ICT in the classroom ranked the highest of 10 options put to teachers: 67 per cent were 'very interested'.

## Approaches to curriculum

A common problem for teachers and schools is a lack of suitable resources. Most schools rely on textbooks (79.2%), many of which (44%) were produced overseas. Teachers expressed concern that these resources were designed for native speakers of the language and that they did not contain any local Australian content that students could relate to. Some overseas-produced textbooks were also said to focus too much on grammar. A key challenge identified with textbooks in general related to multilevel classes found in many CL schools, and the need to adapt the content to suit student levels. This had led many schools (24%) to develop their own textbooks or to use texts written by other schools (27%). On the whole, textbooks were seen as very useful (62.8%) because they provided teachers with planned lessons (32.2%). The constant refrain, however, was that schools needed more materials for young children learning the community language in Australian contexts.

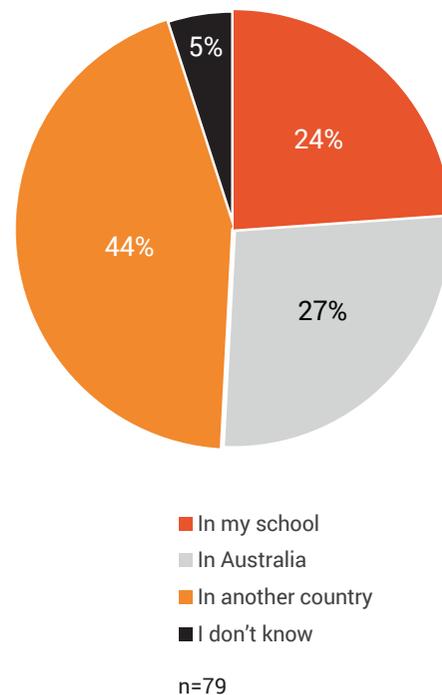


Figure 7 Where textbooks are produced and written



There was a great diversity in terms of curriculum. One Macedonian CL school followed programs based on the NSW government syllabus and shared professional development and planning days with NSW government school teachers. Likewise, many Tamil language schools shared the K-12 curriculum, programs, and cross-school assessment.

Within most languages, however, there were wide variations: one Japanese school principal wrote her school's program and lesson plans for teachers every week, a second Japanese school had a mandated textbook, and a third relied on teacher collaborative planning.

More than half of the 113 schools represented in the survey reported teachers working together to plan lessons (57); principals and school executive decided curriculum in 38 schools, while nine schools left lesson planning up to individual teachers.

## Assessment and Reporting

There was wide variation in student assessment and reporting to parents. Schools recorded student grades once a term (58.1%), once a year (11.8%), and sometimes during the year (14%). Overall assessment practices varied: some schools had standardised assessment practices and activities reflecting school curriculum and outcomes. At the other end of the spectrum were resource-poor schools with little or no assessment practices.

The approaches we found varied from a traditional textbook model to carefully planned lesson and activity sequences to more ad hoc methods. Overall, however, the findings suggest a shift from traditional to more contemporary, child-centred learning.

# The role and capacity of schools

## CL schools make communities

CL schools play a key role in forming and establishing communities, especially for dispersed and emerging language groups. In the past few years, CL schools have been established for Burmese (2016), Chaldean (2019), Dinka (2017), Karen (2019), Mandaean (2018), and Tibetan language groups (2014). These schools provide community services beyond language and cultural teaching. They act as mediators between the families and the host society. CL schools also play an important role in established communities, particularly when they become the main or sole providers of language education.

Our case study of a Thai CL school provides a good illustration of this community-building role. Women in mixed marriages make up two thirds of the Thai community. They are demographically spread throughout Sydney (Beasley, Hirsch & Rungmanee, 2014). The school was established, more than 15 years ago, to build an appreciation of Thai culture and language in a dispersed community.

**We used the premises of the Temple for about two years. [Then] we moved from one place to the other, from the community centre to another to another, until finally we found this school, the home of the Thai language ever since. Principal**

The Thai CL school has the use of a NSW government school's facilities every Sunday morning. Some 80 children attend dance, music and language classes. The playground is filled with parents chatting, children playing, food being prepared; parents leave their children with others to do their shopping; fathers attend language classes. Some parents drive more than 100 kilometres to attend.

The Thai CL school, like many others, began under the aegis of the temple and grew into an organisation that established a community. In many instances, CL schools are the first institutions to move beyond village, regional or religious affiliations. As such, they represent a conduit between the families and the broader Australian society, playing a vital role in the development of the students' bilingual/bicultural identity. Schools often characterise themselves as the 'bridge' between families and the wider community. The principal of one Chinese CL school commented:

**If you look at our school song, we say, 'we are the youth of Australia; we are the descendants of a dragon and we're going to be a bridge.' Look at our badge: it is the Sydney Harbour Bridge ... a bridge between Eastern and Western culture.**

## Small schools/ large schools

There is a key difference in capacity between large and small schools. In many communities, large schools operate on multiple sites with strong management and financial viability. However, there are also a significant number of small schools that have limited capacity and are greatly in need of support. A bipolar pattern of distribution emerged in response to the online survey: while half of the schools had more than five classes (17.2% had more than 15), just over a quarter of schools had only one class (26.7%). This bipolar pattern of distribution has many implications for program organisation and funding. The difference between small and larger schools was highlighted in our study of school networks and organisations: smaller schools generally had less support. Schools with one or two classes had much greater challenges in terms of multi-age groups and multi-level teaching. Differentiation and finding suitable resources were constant concerns. School leaders were also teachers, finances were of greater concern, and communities were generally more dispersed. All of these factors impacted on the strength of the schools.

## Finances

The majority of CL schools, especially smaller ones, struggle to survive financially. School income is mainly government grants (25% to 65%) and fees, together with some fundraising and funding from overseas governments. Smaller schools need greater support in terms of funding provisions, projects, planning, and professional learning – a finding confirmed in other studies (Thorpe, Arthur & Souza, 2018).

Most schools (93%) charge less than \$500 per year or no fees at all. The major expenditure is on teacher reimbursement and professional learning (75% –95%) followed by administration.

Smaller schools in smaller, less affluent communities are particularly constrained. Detailed data was gained in interviews from two typical schools: one with fewer than 100 students and one with more than 500. For the smaller school, government grants accounted for 65 per cent of income, fees 34 per cent, and fundraising less than one per cent. The larger school reported 26 per cent of funding as coming from government grants, 64 per cent from fees, and 10 per cent from fundraising. This suggests that smaller schools with less affluent communities rely more on government grants for survival.

Online principal survey responses indicate that reimbursement for teachers is generally low: 33 per cent of schools give no reimbursement, 24 per cent give less than \$20 per hour, 19 per cent give between \$20 and \$30, and 24 per cent give more than \$30 per hour.

## School location

Most schools (79%) had free use of government school premises and were happy with this arrangement (80%). In interviews, however, teachers and principals reported many problems. The main theme was staffing changes; new principals often had little understanding of community languages schools.

Issues arose particularly in primary schools where grade teachers had their own classrooms. Many CL school teachers resorted to photographing their classrooms before and after classes each week as evidence they had not moved or damaged equipment. Classroom whiteboards were often unavailable because grade teachers had left work on the board with a message saying not to use it.

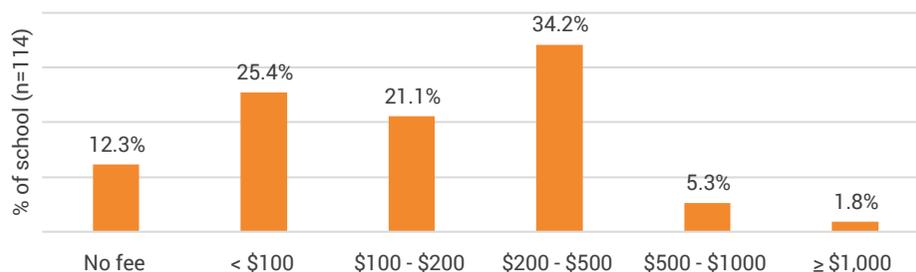


Figure 8 School fees per year

## School leaders and their roles

CL principals play a major role in managing their schools, negotiating complex relationships with key stakeholders. As well as developing relationships with parents, they are responsible for the school's organisation and finances, and the mentoring and professional development of teachers.

CL school leaders have high levels of education (70.8 per cent are university graduates), but our interview data indicated that many of them lack specific qualifications and experience in education. Almost half of our interviewees reported little or no background in primary/secondary teaching.

CL schools operate with a complex network of stakeholders: consulates and country of origin governments, ethnic communities, cultural and religious organisations, parents and families, local schools, and local community organisations. A number of overseas governments (Greek, Turkish, Chinese, Thai, Spanish, Italian) support second language learners in the diaspora. CL school leaders' role in dealing with these stakeholders is shared by mainstream school principals. However, CL schools are much more reliant on such relationships for support and funding.

Relationships with the school community featured prominently in interviews. Although many schools are established in response to community demand, maintaining and developing community support was challenging. Key issues for principals included dealing with unrealistic parental expectations on the one hand, and the lack of parental interest and involvement on the other. Many schools had regular meetings with parents and started early to establish this contact. While mainstream schools also strive to communicate with their parent community and recognise the importance of parental support to maximise educational outcomes, CL schools have to be far more responsive: attendance is not compulsory, parents can have considerable input in school organisation, and teachers and principals have limited time and resources.

Our survey data also found that administration space is needed in CL schools for parent and student interviews, consultations with teachers, teacher meetings, professional learning and record keeping. Only one third of principals (33.7%) had dedicated space at their school for administration. Many used their home (41.1%) or had nowhere (16.8%).

Support for the role of school leaders requires urgent attention. School leaders are highly committed: most have been in their role for more than three years (77%). The needs for school leaders go beyond professional learning to mentoring, support networks and accessible information and advice.



# Findings

## Students and their needs

**The shift from first generation to second, third and fourth generation students has major implications in terms of student support, community development, teacher professional learning, and school 'succession' planning.**

- CL students need a 'voice' across schools and language groups. Student representative councils, similar to those that exist in government schools, would provide a forum in which experiences and ideas could be shared. This is in addition to valuable initiatives such as the Ministers Awards and the Language Ambassadors' Programs, which are already in place.
- The CL schools program now extends from early childhood to primary secondary and adult learners. This should be acknowledged with the provision of appropriate structures.
- The vast majority (96%) of CL school teachers are overseas-born and they are teaching mainly Australian-born students. Professional learning support needs to be targeted, specific, and continuing. Pathways for teachers to NESA accreditation are essential.
- Succession planning is also a priority In many schools, the average age of teachers is 40-60. Where are the pathways for students in the CL schools to become teachers themselves? How can they develop the language proficiency and teaching skills required?

The underrepresentation of students from many language backgrounds needs to be addressed. Pacific Island and African language groups, for example, would benefit from outreach support.

- Maori and 12 Pacific Island language groups now represent the third main language grouping after Chinese and Arabic in NSW with more than 17,790 students (ABS, 2020) and yet there are only schools for three of these languages (104 students in total).
- There is one school with 87 students for almost 14,000 students of 13 different African language backgrounds (ABS, 2020; DOE, 2019).

Of the more than 9,000 students of Filipino background in NSW, only 32 are learning their language. Just 0.8% of Spanish-speaking students are enrolled in CL schools. In dispersed communities, schools find it harder to get their message across. Many smaller schools and smaller language groups do not have the resources to promote themselves.

## A new approach to languages

A major theme that emerged from our study was the interconnectedness of language learning. Students' accounts crossed schools and sectors; parents and community members linked formal lessons with out-of-school learning – at home, through travel, and in the community.

This contrasts markedly with the segmented approach to language learning in NSW, where there is very little cross-over between the early childhood, primary, secondary school, university, adult education, and TAFE sectors. At secondary school level, languages are only mandatory for 100 hours in Years 7 and 8. Language provision for Year 12 and tertiary entry is considered separately. Of the 31 languages in the HSC, none has more than a one per cent participation rate. There has been little consideration of why the uptake in Year 12 is so low. The maintenance of small candidature languages is seen as an unrealistic burden for NESA. Croatian, Khmer, Swedish, Ukrainian and Dutch all have fewer than 10 HSC students (UAC, 2020). Small university and adult education classes in these languages have led to closure. Viability is seen as the responsibility of one institution rather than as an overall provision of language resources.

- Within an already segmented language sector, CL schools are viewed as separate entities where primary-aged children learn their community language and culture. This fails to take into account steadily increasing numbers of preschool, non-background primary school, and adult enrolments. More than 10 per cent of schools also run classes for Year 11 and 12 students.
- CL schools are the sole providers of more than 30 languages in NSW, including Thai, Khmer, and Ukrainian. The role of CL schools in the provision of less commonly taught languages has not been considered in policy and planning for early childhood, school, or adult education language planning.

- CL schools are also the first to respond to emerging language needs. There are schools now for refugee and immigrant languages such as Persian/Dari, Nepali, Assyrian, and Burmese. Many of these communities will grow, generating a demand for language provision in the early childhood, primary, secondary, and adult education sectors. The responsibility for this falls upon CL schools, which are struggling to become viable. As the principal of one Thai school commented:

**We try as hard as we can but there is no Thai subject for Year 12 and no courses anywhere else. Our students ask us 'Why do we study Thai if we cannot do anything with it?'**

The lack of interaction between sectors needs to be addressed. Tamil, for example, is a fast-growing community language; enrolments in CL schools have doubled over the past decade. Tamil is now available in Year 12 and classes are offered in some NSW primary schools. A K-10 syllabus has recently been developed. There is no overall planning, however, for the development of languages resources.

At the other end of the spectrum are established languages such as Greek, Turkish, Maltese, Polish and Ukrainian, for which there are declining mainstream school provisions. NSW K-6 government classes have limited numbers of background speakers. Travel distances are an obstacle for CL school students. Blended online learning, which is used successfully by the Swedish School, is an obvious solution. However, online delivery is prohibited by CL school guidelines and there is no support for this in the government's K-6 program.

There is no systemic or coherent data collection or planning across language provision sectors. We are recommending, therefore, the establishment of a cross-sectoral languages working party to streamline, facilitate and maintain provision across early childhood, primary, secondary and adult education.

Amongst the issues to be addressed are the 15,000 students who are being taught in schools that operate outside the umbrella of government funding. While not all these schools meet the guidelines, many would benefit from support and advice in this area. Three Education Officers provide enormous support for these schools in terms of gaining funding, establishing the school and committee structure, developing programs, and professional learning for teachers. However, they are unable to offer longer-term support. Dedicated funding is required.

Improving links between CL schools and the NSW Saturday School of Community Languages is also a priority. This would require the collection of more specific CL school data on attendance by grade and collaboration with key community organisations to plan strategies that could be embedded in the regular working of all schools.

As complementary providers of languages education in NSW, CL schools should have 'have a place at the table'. Giving this sector a central role in the planning and provision of languages education would lead to the sharing of resources and professional learning, recognition of CL schools as educational providers under the Copyright Act (1968), and by the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA).



## Supporting Teaching and Learning

Our study identified five target areas for support: language-specific resources, teacher professional learning, accredited student assessment, better access to ICT, and access to online learning.

- The development of resources based on specific language groups is a priority. Even languages with rich resources, such as Chinese and Greek, struggle to find material that is pitched at students' proficiency levels and appropriate to an Australian context.
- NESA now has a K-10 language framework for 22 languages, but these syllabuses are written in English educational terminology, which excludes CL teachers. The shift from textbooks to planning units requires time and high educational skills. Professional teacher learning programs are required to address this.
- Student learning in NSW CL schools is not assessed or accredited in any systematic way. SICLE has been tasked with the development of languages progressions and passports, a key recommendation of the NSW Curriculum Review (2020). Recording student outcomes on language learning progressions and online passports may provide to be a reliable accreditation model.
- Overall, access to ICT is low. Some schools are taking advantage of the possibilities in this area, while others are in the early stages of integration. The challenge is to find ways to address the diverse range of needs. No uniform approach to curriculum development, resource development, teacher professional learning, or online resourcing would be effective because of the disparity within and between language groups.
- Many communities are dispersed: particularly those who speak more established languages such as Swedish, Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian. The same is true for communities with high rates of mixed marriages such as Filipino and Thai. Online learning, which is already being successfully utilised by Swedish schools, is an obvious solution. Online learning, however, is specifically prohibited in the NSW CL School guidelines. This anomaly must be addressed. NB: There has been a marked uptake in the delivery of online lessons and learning tools by CL schools in response to the COVID-19 crisis (Cruikshank & McGeoch, *submitted for publication*). This will most likely continue after the crisis is over.

## Building capacity

CL schools are not-for-profit organisations that rely on voluntary teachers and community members. For the amount of government funding, the wider community receives great returns. Our study points to certain areas where targeted support is needed.

The CL school sector is not a 'level playing field'. Smaller schools bear a greater burden in terms of administration and financial viability. We recommended graded funding allocations.

- The role school leaders and principals play in managing CL schools is complex, challenging and multifaceted. Mentoring and professional learning support should be considered.

## Acknowledging the valuable contribution of CL schools

CL schools represent a key sector in the provision of languages education. Acknowledging this means alignment of CL schools with other sectors and articulation of cross-sectoral language learning pathways, something which would lead to the strengthening of languages provision in NSW.



This would require greater co-ordination within the NSW Department of Education. CL schools and the Saturday School of Community Languages are part of School Operations and Performance, languages provision K-12 falls under Educational Services, and teacher supply is administered by People and Culture. The regular collaboration between departmental officers working in the different programs needs to be reflected across divisional structure. Some anomalies which arise because of this lack of co-ordination are as follows:

- CL schools are not covered by the NSW Department of Education copyright licence and therefore have no legal right to copy resources for educational purposes.
- CL schools and SSCL are prohibited in their guidelines from offering online learning; this is reserved for the NSW School of Languages, which is not allowed to teach community languages.
- There is growing demand for teachers of Nepali, Assyrian and Persian/ Dari, but several of these languages have not yet been recognised as subjects by the DOE and there is little information available on ensuring accredited teachers.

The second area of articulation is at school level. Four out of five CL schools now operate out of mainstream school facilities thanks to government support. Despite the general satisfaction with this arrangement, constant problems arise from CL schools' use of government school classrooms. There is a need for a liaison structure, involving the employment of an ex-school principal, to mediate and address any issues arising. The second issue is the lack of ICT support, storage facilities, and administration space within the host schools.

The final area of articulation is between providers and professional associations and accrediting authorities. CL school teachers have little access to professional learning and resources in their host schools or across the independent, Catholic and government sectors. Opening up professional learning opportunities would benefit all sectors.

# Recommendations

## **NSW CL schools be recognised as a complementary sector in languages provision and that alignment and articulation with other sectors be promoted.**

Suggested strategies/ actions:

- The NSW government develop a Languages Policy taking into account the cross-sectoral plans, roles, responsibilities, resources and affordances for languages education.
- CL schools have representation on relevant bodies in the early childhood, primary, secondary, adult, and tertiary education sectors.
- The childhood, primary, secondary, adult, and tertiary education sectors, especially primary and secondary principals' associations, gain representation on the CL school advisory committee.
- The Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (DoE) to collect consistent and coherent data on CL school provision and report regularly to government.
- The DOE include CL schools as educational providers under the Copyright Act (1968).
- CL schools gain access to professional learning opportunities in other educational sectors and professional associations.

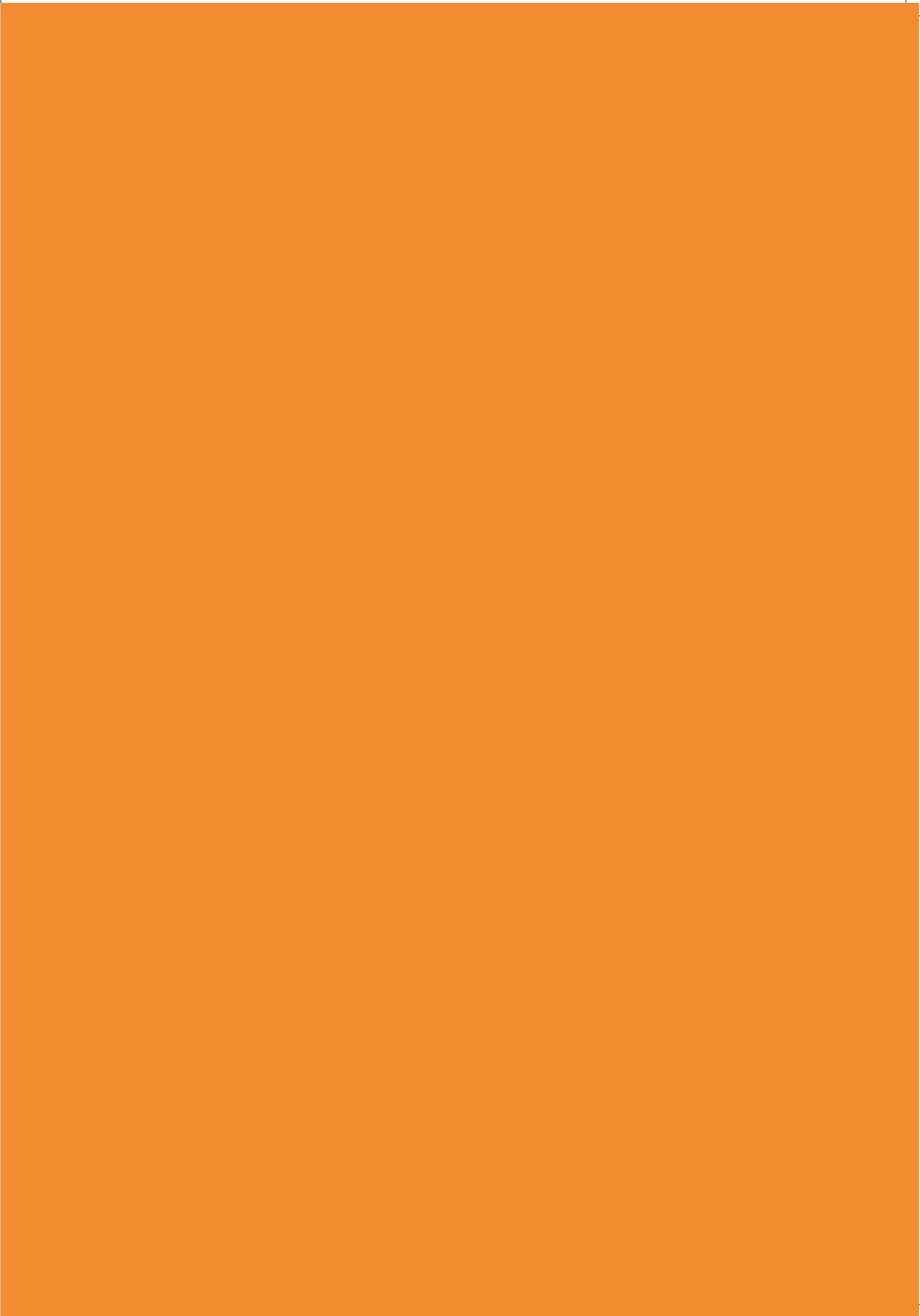
## **The NSW Department of Education undertake a more proactive role in the support and development of NSW Community Languages Schools.**

Suggested strategies/actions:

- Direct DoE employment of the three Education Officers and their location in the Community Languages Schools Program.
- Targeted support for languages and groups of schools to build school capacity
- Targeted initiatives, appropriate guidelines, and program funding for smaller schools and underrepresented, dispersed, and emerging communities.
- Support for resource development for CL schools through continuation of the *Open Language Portal* and appropriate professional learning.
- Changing CL school guidelines to support online and blended learning
- Continuing support for school leaders through the *Management and Leadership in CL schools* program.
- Development of Language progressions and online passports to give appropriate accreditation for student learning.
- Student representative councils, similar to those that operate in NSW government schools, be developed to allow CL students to share their skills and knowledge.
- Professional learning pathways for CL teachers to be provided through continued support for upgrading Master of Teaching Programs, Careers Advice, and for CLT Programs (Foundation and Advanced)
- An ex-principal be employed to strengthen the relationship between government and the CL schools that use their premises.

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University of Sydney**